



THE SHADOW OF WENG-CHIANG

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Bumph

They say that the best sequels are those that take different paths from their predecessors: *Aliens* is a good sequel, while *Friday The 13th Part whatever* isn't. Those of you hoping for the further adventures of Jago and Litefoot in Victorian London, therefore, are in for a disappointment – this is, with any luck, a separate entity.

Anyone looking for more insight on Shanghai in the 1930s should try W. H. Auden's *Journey Into War*, or any one of several books of photographs by Cartier Bresson. A note on Chinese words and names. The currently accepted versions of names, for example Beijing for Peking, came into being in 1949 and did not become official until 1980, hence the characters in this book would only know them by the old version. Tong as a reference to Chinese criminal gangs went out of fashion in the 1920s, but Triad didn't become a common name until a couple of decades later, so I've stuck with the former in the interests of continuity. If you ever visit T'ai Shan, by the way, it's no longer a garden – graffiti and Coke cans have made that place their own. People really are alike all over, it seems.

Thanks this time go to Rebecca and Simon at Virgin, and Alister Pearson for the cover (doesn't the Doctor look totally nuts?). And, of course, all of you who have bought my previous scribblings. For those who like to know such things, there's a glossary at the back of the book. Like a certain omniscient super-being, I won't promise never to return. (And probably with a more introspective character-based book at that, whether it's *Doctor Who* or otherwise.) But now: who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men...?

I know.

Da-da dum, da-da dum, da-da da-da-dum...

Prologue

London, 1937

Before setting out for revenge, first dig two graves
– Chinese proverb

The pale but cheery face of the moon hung proudly amongst its accompanying stars, beaming through the clear skies.

The man who was driving through the East End of London was happier with the cooling breeze than with the sticky heat of the August day. The open top of his blood-red Mercedes 500K afforded him a very refreshing flow of wind through his hair. He was quite lean and had a firm but slightly fleshy face, like a cherub fallen on hard times. He was half-tempted to whistle out loud, but resisted the urge.

The buildings which enclosed the roads had tall walls of Georgian brickwork and sandstone, and were separated from each other by the narrowest of sidestreets. A throaty rumbling heralded the arrival of one of the familiar red Routemaster buses. It was behind the Mercedes, and the driver slowed his pace slightly to allow it to catch up with him. In a matter of moments the empty bus overtook him, briefly shielding the Mercedes from the view of anyone on the far side of the street.

He slipped quietly into a shadowed sidestreet with a fluid twist of the wheel.

He remained seated for a few moments after the engine died, listening for any sound. There should be no one around under the purpling sky at this time of the evening, but one could never be too careful: burglary was a profession that demanded close attention to safety.

Not that he considered himself a burglar, of course; no one would ever think of Lucas Seyton as a common thief. He preferred to view himself as an unofficial sequestrator of other people's ill-gotten gains. As vigilantism went, there were more direct methods, but his family had seen too many cold-blooded killers already. Besides, it was more fun this way, even though Errol Flynn had stolen his thunder and made this occupation something of a cliché.

Seyton eased himself out of the driving seat, pressed himself into the

arch that sheltered a narrow side door and reached for the key. At least the most difficult part of the operation was past – he had had to pick the caretaker's pocket twice in one evening in a local pub. The first time was to get a key to make an impression of it for later copying, and the second to replace it before the man noticed it had gone.

The side door clicked open, and Seyton slipped quietly inside and blinked until his eyes acclimatized to the sudden darkness inside. A narrow staircase led away to the right, while a drab corridor with cracks in the plaster stretched off ahead. The row of doors along the corridor at the top of the stairs all had faded tin stars on them, betraying the fact that this property was once a theatre. The current owner had bought it after its fall from grace in some scandal half a century earlier.

Seyton ignored the steps up to the dressing-rooms, and trod carefully along to the backstage area, aware of the risk of creaky boards. The backstage area was larger than most, and Seyton felt that he might almost be in some cavern, with hanging sandbags for stalactites. The original floor had been removed and now formed a wide catwalk around the wall, from which a wide staircase descended into a pit that opened up before him.

At some point in time, the cellar had been used as the props store. Nowadays it had been converted into a private viewing gallery for valuable theatre memorabilia from all over the world. Descending, Seyton switched on a torch, and played it over the silent cases. The glass all around shimmered with multiple reflections, while the mannequins that were interred within – wearing the finest costumes – cast distorted shadows over the distant walls.

Seyton had to admit that the collection was impressive.

Raymond Huntley's Dracula costume from the first stage version in 1925 rubbed shoulders with one of Edith Piaf's dresses. A cannon used in an eighteenth-century performance of *Macbeth* – the cannon's blast had burned the original theatre to the ground – was pointed directly at what might well have been the first ever Wurlitzer organ.

The fact that the collection was all memorabilia related to the theatre was perhaps unsurprising, given that the owner had been an impresario until his recent and lucrative retirement.

That retirement had been funded by the insurance payouts on

damages to three of his theatres which were losing money.

Unfortunately, the arsonist whom he had hired to burn the third theatre had been a little careless, and the conflagration broke out during a performance of *The Mikado*. Three people had died there – four, if one counted the careless arsonist – for a false insurance claim.

The exhibit Seyton sought was locked in a flat, slightly tilted, case at the end of the cellar. Its leather bindings so worn that it had to be held together with silken knots, a bundle of yellowed papers lay under the light from Seyton's torch. The case was locked, but a few moments with a penknife jammed into the gap between case and lid remedied that.

The bundle emitted a faintly musty scent, but Seyton thought that was just part of its charm. It was four hundred years old, after all; a handwritten first draft of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The families of the three theatregoers who had died in that fire would soon be enjoying a change in their luck, Seyton thought with a smile as he slipped a card onto the cushion in place of the folio. The card bore the design of a robed and winged angel with a forked tail and a grin.

Underneath, in wiry gothic script, was the message *Vengeance has been visited upon you by the Fallen Angel*. Seyton slipped the folio into a small bag, then turned to retrace his steps, and froze.

The large trunk-sized case which had been directly behind him was the only empty one in the museum. This was suspicious enough, but the beam from his torch reflected a mouthful of glass fangs around the hole that had been smashed through one side of the glass. Nobody would break into an empty case, so something must have been removed from it. He shut off the torch instantly, in case the thief was still around.

He couldn't hear anything, but that could just mean that someone else was being as stealthy as he. Remaining where he was was a sure way to be caught, so he silently stepped to the right. He didn't want to risk retracing his entry route in case he was being followed. There was no placard to indicate what exhibit had been removed, from the smashed case, and Seyton didn't really care. What knick-knacks should be lying around here were not his business. On the other hand, the presence of other thieves was his business. Not only would they not adhere to his principles, but their work might be falsely attributed to him.

There was a faint dragging sound from above, in the backstage area.

He brushed against a weighted rope that hung from the scenery gantry, and grabbed hold of it. The stairs might be watched by whoever else was around, so climbing up the rope would be a more discreet alternative. He slithered up the rope with ease, and swung gently onto the open area backstage. He couldn't see anyone, but there were so many shadows around that half of Scotland Yard could be waiting for him.

There was something glistening on the floor, however; a stain which was too dark to identify at first. Kneeling briefly, Seyton touched his finger to the wet smear. It came away red against his skin, with the oiled copper tang of fresh blood. He straightened slowly, and his eyes fell upon a pair of legs poking out from under the thick main curtain. The smears of blood led straight to it. He stepped towards the curtain and pulled it aside. The grey-whiskered bald caretaker from whom he had acquired his stage door key was sprawled there, a trickle of blood stretching down from the corner of his slack mouth. Seyton's good humour vanished instantly. Stealing was one thing, but murder was quite another. A life wasn't a mere possession to take. There was no blood on the caretaker's shirt front, so Seyton assumed he had been shot or stabbed. But who had dragged him over here?

The answer came accompanied by a lightning kick to the side of the head, as a lithe figure in loose dark clothing leapt out of the shadows. Seyton went sprawling across the boards, his head ringing from the blow. Whoever it was certainly wasn't playing by the Marquess of Queensberry rules; most unsporting. Still, what was good for the goose was good for the gander. He recovered his balance as his assailant ran at him, and took advantage of his longer legs to deliver a straight kick in the crotch before his opponent could strike again. The man went down with a howl.

Before Seyton could examine his attacker, another body slammed into him, and they went down struggling. The other pressed a knee into Seyton's back, and quickly wrapped a silk sash around his throat. Seyton tried elbowing his opponent in the stomach, but to no avail. He still had his penknife, however, and managed to slip it between throat and sash. The sash parted under the blade, and his opponent fell back. Seyton turned with a fist already swinging, but the other man blocked it with a forearm and punched Seyton twice in the stomach.

Seyton head-butted him, and hurled him over the edge of the floor. The attacker grabbed one of the weighted ropes as he fell, and arrested his drop.

Seyton ignored him, as there were more footsteps converging on his position from all around.

Something gleamed silver in the limited light, and Seyton acted purely on instinct. He leapt behind a compère's mahogany lectern, heaving his Webley from his pack even as a whirring hatchet thudded into the wood. There was a rush of scurrying footsteps from the darkness, and Seyton fired two shots in their general direction. Some people gave thieves a bad name, he told himself

A strange metallic multiple-click came from the shadows at the top of the stairs down into the viewing gallery. The only time he had heard anything like that before was in Chicago, Seyton recalled, but what had it been? He remembered with a sudden chill, and broke from behind the lectern, dashing across the darkened stage just ahead of a sudden spray of bullets from the Thompson which had been so noisily cocked.

The orchestra pit opened up before him like a welcoming trench at the fringes of no-man's-land, and he gratefully allowed himself to drop into it. The Thompson's muzzle flashed brightly again as more shots stuttered over his head.

The muzzle flashes provided a splendid target, however, and Seyton fired twice. There was a cry and a tremendous crash of breaking glass and shattering mannequins from the backstage darkness.

'*Wo shoushang*,' someone groaned. It came from the direction of the first man who had attacked him. If the one with the Thompson had – as Seyton suspected – fallen onto the display cases in the lower level after being shot twice, he would be in no condition to call out anything.

'*Mei shi*,' a woman's voice hissed from somewhere. What the hell was a woman doing in all this? Plucky, but hardly civilized, Seyton thought.

'*Zenme ban*? ' another voice put in.

'*You ta. Wo yao qu matou xianzai!* ' A dragging sound, accompanied by the muted groaning of the shot man, shifted across the stage. Seyton quickly scampered out of the orchestra pit, hoping that the sounds his erstwhile opponents were making would mask his own footsteps.

There was a hollow rumbling from somewhere, and the enemy's footsteps became progressively more muffled. They must be heading

down into the viewing gallery in the cellar, Seyton realized. He hurried across the stage to where the caretaker's body had been. It was gone, though a smeared blood trail remained on the floor, leading towards the steps down to the cellar. A couple of bloody footprints had been left on the floor as well. Curiously, one was no more than four inches long. He looked down into the cellar next, and saw that a couple of display cases near the foot of the stairs had been smashed into bloody fragments. There was no sign of a body there either, but a section of the cellar floor had been raised to leave a gap with bloodstains around the edges.

Acutely aware that the murderers were getting away, Seyton dismissed his sense of caution, and slid down the nearest rope. The floor was covered in glass fragments and pieces of mannequins' limbs, but something else caught Seyton's eye amongst the wreckage. A small pale square of card was leaning against a broken piece of wood, and Seyton picked it up. It was a matchbook of some kind, though the cellar was too dark to make out any details. He dropped it into his pocket, before finding a ladder affixed to the side of the shaft under the floor section. He clambered down, descending only a few feet, and stepped out into a claustrophobic but empty room with a curved ceiling. On the far side, a sour stink of rot and decay wafted in through a large circular opening that was pitch black inside. It didn't take much effort for Seyton to deduce that it was an opening to the sewers. Just where such rats belonged, he told himself.

Steeling himself against the smell, he hurried in. He decided to risk switching on the torch, but was careful to hold it as far to the side of his body as possible, lest any ambushers use it as a target. The rancid water through which he ran wouldn't be doing his patent leather pumps any good either, he realized.

Something clattered against his foot, and he stopped to shine the torch on it. It was a skull of some sort of animal, perhaps eighteen inches long. He couldn't help thinking that its pointed nose looked like that of a mouse or rat. The pause was unexpectedly useful, however, as without the splashing of his own feet, he could hear faint voices ahead. Letting the skull slip from his mind, he continued onwards.

Before long, the tunnel began to brighten, as the light from distant streetlamps crept in from an opening ahead. Now that he could watch for obstructions in his path, Seyton switched off the torch and ran faster. Unfortunately, just as he came to the last stretch before the outflow opening, he heard the roar of an engine. He pushed himself faster, and skidded to a halt at an algae-rimmed opening overlooking

the churning waters of the Thames.

Stooping cranes and squat warehouses were spread across the far bank, but between them and Seyton, a powerful motorboat with several black-clad figures aboard was accelerating away from the outflow opening in which he stood.

Seyton leaned against the wall of the outflow, and recalled the matchbook he had found. There was enough light to read by now, and he fished it from his pocket. The cover had some sort of Chinese ideogram on it, along with the legend, Club Do-San. Seyton's eyebrows shot up. 'Well, well...'

Despite having had no warning that his employer was returning, Monk opened the door for him as Seyton ascended the steps of his Kensington house. Monk's square face and crooked nose were legacies of his earlier days as a boxer, but these days he had a more peaceful profession as a valet.

'Run a bath for me, old boy,' Seyton told him. 'I seem to have picked up the most damnable stink from somewhere.'

'It's already waiting, sir.'

'Oh. In that case, while I get freshened up, I'd like you to send a telegram for me. I have some news that might greatly interest a friend in Shanghai.'

One

Shanghai

Though the night was still young when Seyton returned home to Kensington, it was well into the small hours when Shek Yeung applied the brakes to a rusty old Opel truck. He had stolen it a few hours earlier, and now drew up beside the North Railway's freight loading area not far from the banks of Suzhou Creek.

The freight terminal lacked the neoclassical architecture of the more well-off areas of Shanghai. It was mostly built of timber, with iron supports and brick outbuildings. The actual railway tracks and sidings were mostly just laid across a dark field, with grey planking between them to allow engineers to fuel or water the trains. Reflected moonlight picked out the rails themselves as pale veins threading across the ground.

Beyond them, the city's lights flickered in the breeze, since a fair amount of the streetlights were naked flames in paper shades.

The station was in a more utilitarian and cosmopolitan area than the freight terminal. The western edge of the Japanese Concession sat like a watching tiger on the eastern side of the street, and Europeans of various persuasions had land on the other side. Yeung wasn't afraid of any of them; the authorities of all the concessions were so wary of stepping on each other's toes that the freight terminal was not as well guarded as it might have been. No government wanted to risk jurisdictional disputes by showing too much of a presence here.

The Concessions of America, Japan and Germany were all guarded by their own troops. It was an odd arrangement for the prime trading city of Nationalist China, but it seemed to work. Technically, though, the British-run Settlement Police had jurisdiction here, so Yeung kept a wary eye out for any sign of their diligent Sikhs.

He rubbed idly at the scar that branched across his swollen-looking cheek, and lowered his burly frame to the ground. He slapped the side of the truck to rouse his confederates to business. The ten men were scruffy dock rats in mismatched items of clothing that were either hand-me-downs or simply stolen from washing lines.

Yeung wasn't impressed; his shabby black garb might be of low quality, but he had paid for it new, with the proceeds of rolling a

drunk or two. Unlike his partners in crime, Yeung at least had some standards.

The men reached back into the truck to pull out a trolley with some cutting equipment and associated gas cylinders.

Their arms were all covered with scratches and bruises from mishandling it, but Yeung didn't care; all that mattered was that he could see that none of them had a Tong or Triad tattoo.

It was not that he disapproved of the Tongs; but the Great Circle in particular didn't like unauthorized crimes, so they would certainly disapprove of him. While his men struggled with the cutting gear, Yeung lifted a fire axe down from the cab of the truck and moved towards a side door. The freight warehouse had huge doors at either end so that trains could be shunted from the main line to inside the building, but someone would notice if he opened them.

Yeung used to work here, until he was sacked for pilfering the petty cash, and so he knew that the night watchmen were lazy and only watched those main doors across the tracks. This side door, therefore, was fair game.

Hefting the axe in his massive arms, he swung it down onto the solid padlock. It took only a few blows to shatter the lock, which dropped to the ground. Unfortunately, the noise had not gone unnoticed, and he opened the door to find three watchmen skidding to a halt.

Yeung slammed the haft of the axe into the nearest watchman's face with a wet splintering sound. The others tried to run, but Yeung's dock rats swarmed over them before they got ten paces, and beat them to the ground.

Leaving the unconscious men, Yeung moved inside the warehouse. The others followed, dragging the cutting gear on its little trolley. Yeung searched for the fuse box to turn the lights on. Two wide trenches ran through the stone floor, with a pair of tracks in each, leaving room for four trains to be loaded or unloaded at one time. Thick iron pillars supported the distant roof, and the floor had its own landscape of dirty and smudged crates.

One set of rolling stock was in residence; half a dozen boxcars, the last of which was constructed of steel rather than wood. Taking a satisfied deep breath of air, which was tinted with the scent of oil, rust and wood shavings, Yeung directed his men towards the steel boxcar.

The door of the boxcar was emblazoned with the logo of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank. That, and the unusual sturdiness of its construction, meant that even the most opium-fuzzed mind among Yeung's band could work out what sort of cargo it contained. Waving the others to spread out and keep watch – three guards was so little that it was suspicious –

Yeung watched as his cracksman, Liu, ignited the cutting flame.

'Be careful with that,' Yeung warned. 'There are KMT wages inside, both banknotes and bonds; we don't want them burnt.'

'I know what I'm doing,' the weaselly Liu assured him. He lowered a pair of black goggles over his greasy face, and played the flame across the thick latch in order to soften it generally.

Yeung had never been patient, and all this waiting was making him jumpy. Every vehicle that passed in the distance made him reach for his gun. After a few minutes, and an increase in the metallic smell of the air, Liu shut off the cutting flame, and started to prise open the door with a crowbar. Yeung snatched it from him as the others hurried over, breathless with excitement.

Yeung's bulging muscles were a better match for the weight of the door than Liu's, and at least Yeung felt that his irritation was being put to good use in pulling the door open.

Yeung relaxed with a sigh as the door finally swung wide, and he discarded the crowbar without a second thought. He suddenly felt a very unseasonable chill as he saw the tiny piece of card that was the sole occupant of the boxcar's dusty floor.

Feeling as dissociated from himself as if he had been bewitched by a ghost, Yeung picked up the card. In Chinese ideograms, it read 'Crime does not pay'. On the reverse side was 'I know'.

There was a faint footfall from above. Yeung looked up, having been in Shanghai's underworld long enough to know in advance what he would see. A lean figure in boots and a leather coat was watching them from atop a hill of crates, his face obscured by motorcycle goggles. 'All the money has been re-routed to a different warehouse. Drop your weapons, and wait quietly.' The voice was perfunctory and clearly used to command. Yeung hadn't noticed his approach, since the black leathers blended in so well with the moonless night. 'The Settlement Police will be here in moments; we will all wait quite comfortably.'

He had heard of the man, though. The petty criminals who frequented Yeung's favourite waterfront bars spoke of a nuisance they had nicknamed Yan Cheh – Man of Endurance.

They were a superstitious bunch of dock rats, who got so drunk before a job that they could scarcely stand. Whether Yan Cheh was a police officer, or just some young fool who had listened to too much of the American forces' vigilante radio dramas, he would cease operations tonight. First, though, Yeung would find out how he came to be waiting here for them. He decided he would only maim this Yan Cheh to start with.

'Yan Cheh,' he called out, 'endure this!' He swept open the blade of a butterfly knife. Yan Cheh shifted slightly, a Colt 45 appearing in one hand and firing instantly. Yeung ducked instinctively, then cursed himself as the lights went out, the fuse box shattered by the bullet. His hand had already released the knife on its curving path through the air, and he hurled himself to the side just in case.

There was a soft swishing sound a few yards away; and a high-pitched scream. The boom of a shotgun immediately followed, the blaze of sparks from the muzzle jetting briefly in the direction of the cry. Yeung was puzzled and unnerved.

Somehow he had lost the initiative, and he didn't dare ask what was going on in case the noise alerted Yan Cheh to his position. His companions were not so careful, however; the fools were chattering to each other and bumping into crates as noisily as pregnant pandas.

Moving as silently as he could, Yeung drew out the Nambu pistol he had looted from a Japanese bluejacket back in the troubles of '32, and padded towards the source of the scream.

His foot slipped in something wet, but he didn't need to see to be able to identify the source of the warm coppery smell that haunted the area.

'Put down your weapons and wait for the police.' The voice drifted around the warehouse. Yeung clenched his massive fist around the Nambu as he glared into the darkness. If Yan Cheh would just keep that up and give him time to determine his position...It seemed to be coming from the right, and Yeung quickly adopted a firing stance and fired several shots in the direction of the sound.

There was the clang of bullets hitting metal and a ball of yellow fire erupted with a soft whoosh as Yeung's shots hit the oxyacetylene

equipment. Yeung was slammed off the platform and onto the neighbouring tracks by a blast of heat, while Liu was blown clear across the loading area, his body a mass of flames. When Yeung's vision cleared, he saw that the blast had cut down another two men as well.

A number of the warped and dusty crates around were on fire, as was the nearest boxcar. At least, Yeung thought, there was now some light to see by. The remaining five visible members of Yeung's gang picked themselves up from the sawdust-strewn floor and looked around fearfully.

The survivors turned as running footsteps approached the far side of the stack of crates. Since it was from the opposite direction to the last sound from Yan Cheh, perhaps it was one of Yeung's men coming to see what had happened. Yeung signalled for the others to hold their fire for now, and looked around for his fallen Nambu.

The running stopped an instant before Yan Cheh vaulted over the stacked crates, two Colt.45 automatics firing in turn.

Two more thieves slammed to the ground under multiple impacts, and the others bolted, as Yan Cheh landed on the raised loading platform and the guns jammed empty. Yeung saw his chance, and sprang up onto the platform, tugging a *nunchaku* from a deep pocket. Yan Cheh spun at the sound of the footfall, drawing a *katana* from under his leather coat.

Yeung leapt back to avoid a vicious slash, and snapped the nunchaku forward so that the chain between the staves wrapped itself around the sword's blade.

Yan Cheh immediately tugged the sword back, and Yeung stumbled forward with it, to receive a kick in the stomach. The combatants flew apart, their weapons tumbling to the floor.

Yan Cheh dived headlong for one of his Colts while Yeung realized that there was a fallen gun butt a few inches from his hand. He grabbed for it, knowing that Yan Cheh would still have to reload, and rolled up into a kneeling position with a clear shot at Yan Cheh's back.

The gun merely clicked. With a sinking feeling, Yeung realized it was only Yan Cheh's other empty Colt, and not his own Nambu. Yan Cheh turned so that Yeung could see the slide slip forward to cycle a fresh round into the chamber of the reloaded gun.

Yan Cheh shook his head as he looked at the empty gun in Yeung's hand. 'No, no, no. Sorry.' He cocked the hammer of his gun with his thumb, then looked round as the alarmed tones of police whistles squealed to each other over by the doors. He shifted the gun, and shot Yeung in the leg. 'Don't go away.' Yeung's scream almost drowned out the words, and a brief flash of red-tinged pain blotted out the blur of Yan Cheh's departure.

The gun vanished from Yeung's hand with a sharp pull, and when he opened his eyes, both Yan Cheh and the *katana* were gone. A pair of uniformed Sikhs turned the corner and hauled him roughly to his feet, but he had set his mind against the pain, and clearly heard the roar of a motorcycle engine start up outside and fade into the distance.

* * *

The space-time vortex was a whirlpool of paradox; a dimension where reality was only a matter of timing, and the universe was but a larger than average singularity. As if to reflect this knowledge, at least one of the craft that travelled there was equally paradoxical, being a sprawling technological pocket dimension tucked away inside a battered wooden and concrete shell.

Enclosed by the walls of a police telephone box from a small island in Earth's mid twentieth century, the circuitry of an antiquated Type 40 Gallifreyan time capsule hummed steadily.

The capsule's owner – by right of possession at least – was a tall man with dark curly hair. A very expressive face surrounded his long nose and wide piercing eyes. His chocolate-brown overcoat blended in with the darkness of the small room in which he stood, though the garish stripes of a very long scarf which was looped around his shoulders several times stood out rather better. As well as being very dark, the room was also almost empty. The only furnishings were a Victorian iron safe and a plain table.

He looked at the trio of opalescent crystalline chunks in his hands, weighing them with a puzzled expression. 'Now,' he murmured to himself, 'how did she do that again?'

A delicate feminine hand plucked the crystals from his grip.

The hand belonged to a tall, slim woman in a simple red skirt and top. She had a classically modelled face with high cheekbones and lustrous dark hair that fell about her shoulders. 'It's like this, Doctor,' she said, putting one crystal on the plain table and then sliding the other two

pieces onto it to form a jagged half-cube.

‘Ah, Romana, that’s showing off, you know.’ Romana only cocked an eyebrow. The Doctor cleared his throat loudly, then handed her a slim probe lined with strange filaments and a few simple electronic keys set into the handle. ‘Why don’t you go and see where the next segment is?’

‘All right.’ She turned and went back out into the console room.

The Doctor crouched down, his eyes level with the three linked crystalline segments on the worktop. ‘How does she do that, K9? Eh?’ He lifted the assembled chunk of jagged crystal and waggled the most recently attached segment as if it were a loose tooth. The other occupant of the room was a boxy and squared-off metal construction with tiny dish antennae for ears and a long aerial for a tail. It looked not unlike a dog that had either been bred for René Magritte, or come off worst in a fight with a car crusher.

K9’s central processor calculated – based on statistics of past behaviour – that the Doctor was tempted to disassemble it in order to try to put it together himself, but wasn’t willing to risk the embarrassment of probable failure. All the evidence he had gathered indicated that humanoids required occasional reassuring interpretations of the facts for their continued psychological wellbeing. ‘Beginner’s luck, master.’

‘What? Beginner’s lu–’ The Doctor leapt up into a standing position. ‘A fluke; that’s it, of course! Anyone can get lucky from time to time.’ He looked down at K9, and put a finger to his lips, coughing discreetly. ‘We’d better not tell Romana that it was just luck; I mean, we don’t want to hurt her feelings, do we?’

‘Negative, master.’ Of course, K9 had also observed that the Doctor’s behaviour seemed to be more of a rebellion against being conscripted than anything else. The TARDIS had been diverted from a planned holiday to Haarlagen Three by a being the Doctor referred to as the White Guardian, though K9’s data banks were blank on that subject. The White Guardian had instructed the Doctor to seek out the six segments of the Key to Time, so that a universal balance might be restored. So far they had recovered three segments, and had just left Earth after capturing the third. This achievement hadn’t mollified the Doctor very much as far as K9 could tell.

Then again, the Doctor had never shown any sign of enjoying doing

other people's 'dirty work'. K9 was a little unsure of the meaning of the Doctor's oft-used phrase, but assumed it had something to do with exertive sweating.

'No...' The Doctor's voice trailed off as a flicker of light rippled through the crystal. 'That's odd.' He moved around the table to position himself between the crystal and the only door, presumably wondering if it was a refraction of light coming in from outside. The light continued to waver across the opalescent crystal like windblown rain trickling down a window. The Doctor looked back over his shoulder.

'Romana!' He turned back. 'K9, what do your sensors tell you about that?'

A probe antenna was set between the glowing red photoreceptors that served as K9's eyes, and he directed this antenna towards the assembled segments. The segments of the Key to Time were highly charged with energies he couldn't identify at the best of times, and this was no exception.

'Energy levels have not increased. Beyond that, I cannot postulate.'

Romana ran back in, sliding to a halt at the table. 'What's wrong?'

'I'm not sure. Look.' He nodded towards the assembled crystal's luminescent display. 'None of the segments have ever done that before.'

Romana bent to examine it. 'Could it be a natural part of its function? Perhaps it starts glowing after reaching a critical mass and increases with each subsequent segment.'

'There is one way to tell.' The Doctor tentatively touched the crystal as if expecting it to be hot, but then grabbed it firmly and pulled the three segments apart. They each continued flickering softly. 'So much for that theory. I wonder... This could be some sort of interference from the Black Guardian: trying to snatch the segments.'

'The defence shield is still on.'

The Doctor gave his peculiar facial shrug. 'The White Guardian was able to totally control the TARDIS while the shield was on...Ah!'

Romana stepped back involuntarily at his exclamation.

‘What?’

‘The Black Guardian would have equal power; so if this was him, then why not simply stop the TARDIS and take it?’

His face fell. ‘Of course, in my experience, the opposition always goes for the opposite style too.’

‘Stealth and subtlety.’

‘Yes. Can’t think why, unless it’s just more fun that way; outwitting someone is always an ego boost, isn’t it?’

She raised a delicately arched eyebrow. ‘That sounds like a confession to me.’

The Doctor ignored her comment, gathering up the segments and tossing them unceremoniously into the safe. ‘If it’s a diversion, then we’ll ignore it.’ He marched out of the room.

Outside the small dark room was a larger white room, with glowing circular indentations set into the walls. In the centre of the room, a glass cylinder rose and fell at the heart of a sloped hexagonal console atop a pedestal. A rather battered hat of greenish-brown felt was slouched atop the column. The six panels of the console were awash with old-fashioned knobs and dials that were a peculiar contrast to the sophisticated energies they controlled in order to guide the TARDIS safely through the vortex.

The wandlike probe the Doctor had given Romana was lying on the navigational panel, so the Doctor scooped it up and slotted it into a small socket. This was the locatormutor core, designed to locate each segment, and then transmute it from its disguised state into its real form. It crackled slightly, and numbers began flickering across the navigational display.

The Doctor peered at them. ‘Interesting. They’ve only changed by a couple of digits. That just takes us back to Earth.’

Romana shook her head. ‘Surely there wouldn’t be two segments hidden on Earth.’

‘Maybe that’s what any searchers are supposed to think.’

The Doctor programmed in the specified coordinates, and threw the dematerialization switch. ‘We have no choice but to check.’

Sung-Chi Li ignored the mass of laden people that thronged through Bubbling Well Road. Most of them would be on errands for their employers or even – strictly unofficially – owners. He dodged around an oncoming Ford, and marched firmly towards a small cluster of uniformed Sikhs who were gathered on the far side of Wing On's department store.

Li was balding, though retained something of a widow's peak pretty far back, and had an easygoing and friendly face despite his slightly pointed chin emerging from a wide jaw. He wore a faint smile, almost purely out of habit, and a neatly pressed dark grey suit that was in stark contrast to the Sikhs' sandy uniforms. Despite the fact that Li was almost half a head taller than the average Chinese in the street, the Sikhs towered over him. The Sikh sergeant in his British uniform and turban looked bored stiff; and Li couldn't blame him; the nightly routine could wear down anyone.

Nevertheless, the routine was routine because it was established procedure, and Li wouldn't tolerate any departures from procedure. They were the guardians of law and order, after all, so their lives ought to be ordered. The Sikh didn't bother to salute as Li approached; they only saluted their British superior officers. Li didn't care for their lack of respect at all. 'Are we looking for anyone in particular tonight?' the Sikh asked.

'No. Just the usual round of waterfront rats looking to cause trouble among the labourers.'

'They'll be handed over to you as soon as we've arrested them.'

'Don't you ever get tired of handing over arrestees to the Kuomintang?'

The Sikh shrugged. 'It's less paperwork.' Li nodded, though he was appalled at this open display of informality.

China was actually ruled by the Kuomintang, an alliance of Nationalist warlords founded in 1911 by Sun Yat Sen. They overthrew the Emperor Pu Yi while he was still a boy, about which Li didn't care one way or the other. There had soon emerged a growing Communist movement, filtering down from the USSR in the north.

When Chiang-Kai Shek took over the Kuomintang, he launched several punitive expeditions against the Communist insurgents, eventually

driving them into the mountainous country in north and central China. Li approved of that.

Keeping such anarchists out of the cities was a wonderful goal. Perhaps that was what got him this post, since Chiang's most fanatical general in these expeditions was Du Yue Sheng, Li's boss, who was made Minister for Opium Suppression as a reward for his efforts.

Not all of Chiang's policies were quite so palatable. Letting the British use their Sikhs to police the International Settlement and hand over those they caught for punishment was actually easier on Li, but he didn't make it the be-all and end-all of his procedures. Unfortunately, it meant that the arrestees – especially foreigners or the rich – had a chance to make separate deals with the British in attempts to evade the handover. Things were no better in the French Concession, where Vietnamese troops filled the role the Sikhs played in the International Settlement. Li didn't even like to think about the mixture of British, American and Japanese Marines that patrolled the docklands and their smaller concessions within the Settlement. Most days he just wished he would be assigned back to the Old City in the south-east corner of Shanghai, where he could follow through every stage of police procedures.

Sadly, it seemed his luck remained bad. Confusion was the price the Kuomintang had been willing to pay for Western alliances, it seemed. He was too used to the realities of life to worry about them, however, and knew his place in the order of things.

* * *

The moon cast a gentle glow over the neoclassical façade that lined one side of the wide road. The majority of the windows in these walls were dark. The whole expanse looked like a financial area of Chicago in a Jimmy Cagney film. Directly opposite, a massive bridge of steel and iron was very firmly set into the landscape, its high curved sides guiding the road across a sluggish river. Similar buildings and a small landscaped garden graced the far bank.

An Opel truck and a couple of Citroëns had just passed across the bridge, when a strained mechanical groaning insinuated itself into the night air from no apparent source. A yellow light glowed faintly in the air, and a British metropolitan police telephone box coalesced just where one of the bridge's walkways joined the pavement opposite the buildings.

After a moment, the door opened, and the Doctor emerged, jamming a well-worn hat onto his mop of curls. He stepped out onto the road and looked around with wide-eyed interest as Romana and K9 followed him. The Doctor locked the TARDIS doors.

Romana turned in a slow circle, holding the tracer out in front of her. When it was pointing across the river but off to the right of the bridge, it started to tick. It wasn't the normal crackle with which it reacted to a segment of the Key to Time, but a slow steady ticking. 'It's never done that before,' she murmured.

The Doctor grabbed the tracer out of her hand, and tapped it on the nearest girder. He held it to his ear with a frown. 'I told you never to trust these gimmicky gadgets. We don't really know much about Guardian technology – maybe it's slipped a gear or something.' He handed it back to her. 'Or maybe we've just materialized too far away from the source this time.'

'Where are we anyway?'

"The wickedest city in the world." Despite this apparently worrisome phrase, the Doctor seemed delighted by their surroundings, in so far as K9's behavioural analysis software could tell.

'That really narrows it down.'

'Paris of the East, the Whore of China...We're in Shanghai, unless somebody has stolen the Waibaidu bridge, since that's what we are standing on. Probably the nineteen-thirties, going by those cars that just passed.'

Romana looked back at the ticking tracer, then over the river towards the European-style buildings beyond. 'It's definitely coming from that direction. Have you any ideas what's over there?'

'The main business district. It's been a couple of centuries since I was last here.'

'When was that?'

'Nineteen forty-one.' He started off along the bridge. 'Not a very pleasant time; especially with those stranded Alpha Centauris panicking all over the place – what a first contact to make with their nearest neighbours...'

Two

Coolies laden with boxes of fruit or jerricans had no right of way where the authorities were concerned. Some leapt into the path of oncoming rickshaws in their haste to get out of the way of the phalanx of impassive Sikhs. The turbaned Settlement Police stood aside for no one as they marched down the banner-hung street.

The architecture was a mixture of different European styles as well as Chinese. Most of the buildings had smooth grey plaster disguising their brick construction, with wooden verandas and balconies clinging to the upper storeys. The washing lines that were strung between windows frequently had the ends on opposite sides of the street rather than just on adjacent windows. Li found it all uncomfortably chaotic.

Steam and the scents of spices filled the air as wizened cooks and washerwomen did their chores on rickety home-made balconies. Li, however, took more notice of a quite different tang that was a hint in the cool night air. A cloud of rippling blue-grey smoke wreathed a couple of drunks as they stumbled out of a door on the corner directly ahead. The gods had smiled on those two, it seemed.

The Sikhs arrowed straight for the peeling door, shoving their way in to the accompaniment of cries of dismay from within. There was chaos in the grubby bar-room as Li followed the Sikhs inside. A couple of men in plain black trousers and tunics tried to hold off the Sikhs, while others pushed themselves away from the tables and dived for the far door and the windows.

Li was not surprised at their reaction, as the blue-fuzzed air was thick with the acrid smoke from opium pipes. The smokers must be somewhere else in the building, though, as they certainly wouldn't be able to leap around with such alertness. Another four Sikhs burst through the far door, and the knot of startled patrons scattered.

Leaving the Sikhs to round up the more rowdy patrons, Li ran his eyes along the upper part of the walls where they met the ceiling. If there were any sign of smoke escaping from any hidden rooms, that was where it would show. The faint stain on the plasterwork above a shelf-filled alcove behind the bar was exactly the sort of thing he was looking for. He shoved the protesting barman aside, and started sweeping bottles off the shelves, looking for the hidden catch or lever that would open the concealed door.

One bottle resisted the impact of his arm, and he tugged at it. The alcove obligingly swung open. Beyond was a short passageway, curtained off at the far end. Li beckoned a couple of the Sikhs to follow him, then drew his Kuomintang issue Browning Hi-Power and entered the passageway before the sergeant could point out that Li didn't have the authority to order him around.

A plain room of crumbling brickwork and cracked plaster was beyond the curtain, scarcely lit by the few candles that were dotted around. The little flames were mostly for lighting pipes rather than for seeing by, it appeared. Li could hardly draw breath as he entered, so thick were the fumes in the room. Shapeless people were slouched in rough pallets around the walls, unfocused and motionless but for the occasional twitch of a vein. A couple of men were suckling on little tin pipes, while a third had frozen almost comically as the policemen entered, a tiny droplet of resin hanging delicately from the tip of a needle over the bowl of a tin pipe.

The frozen man suddenly yelled in fright, and someone in one of the straw-filled pallets groaned at him to shut up. A Sikh had already grabbed the unfortunate would-be smoker, and was shoving him back out through the passage to the bar, while others tried to shake the sedated patrons into wakefulness.

Li noticed another curtain on the far side of the room, and a rather battered wooden door in the corner opposite. If anyone else was behind the curtain, they would share their friends' fate. He walked over carefully – someone not quite comatose could still inflict a nasty cut with a knife – and flicked the curtain aside.

All he saw beyond it was a black flash, and he found himself slammed to the wooden floor. The pale form of a Sikh's uniform flickered past as Li staggered to his feet. The side of his head felt as if it were swelling up like a balloon. He could taste blood and half his teeth and tongue were on fire, or so it felt. The Sikh clubbed the black-clad man who had kicked Li, while others spilled out into the room and attacked the Sikhs with an alertness that was in great contrast to the stupor of the room's drugged inhabitants.

Ignoring the buzzing in his ears, Li made for the curtain again, punching aside a coolie who tried to stop him. The coolie held onto Li's jacket, dragging him down as he fell. Li got a quick glimpse of another slim form leaving the curtained-off section: it looked like a woman in a long white overcoat. He was so surprised that he lost his concentration long enough for his opponent to headbutt him. Li

reeled, rolling onto his back so that he could kick upwards with both legs. His feet caught the coolie in the stomach, and he collapsed atop a comatose smoker with an explosive gasp. Li leapt back to his feet and looked around for the woman.

She had paused by the wooden door opposite, surveying the fight with a small boy in her arms. Her hair was tied in a tight bun, and she had startlingly green eyes, rare in a Chinese. Li thought that she was probably the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She looked directly at him for a moment, then broke eye contact and turned away.

Even as he shoved his way through the mass of struggling bodies, Li wondered what sort of woman would bring her young son to such a place. Beautiful or not, that was unforgivable. She disappeared through the door a few seconds before Li reached it.

He kicked it open, and in the process almost sent himself tumbling down the steep flight of stairs beyond it. He regained his balance by grabbing hold of the handrail, and ran down the steps two at a time. The base of the stairs was at another door, and he burst through it into a filthy alleyway without a second thought. Whoever the woman was, Li wasn't going to let her get away.

His carelessness was unwise, as he realized when a hand grabbed his shoulder and spun him round. He blocked the incoming punch instinctively as he turned, and slammed the heel of his hand into his attacker's face. The man reeled backwards, then pulled a wicked-looking fisherman's knife from a pocket, just as a pair of hands wrapped themselves around Li in an attempt to hold him for the knife.

Li drove his elbow into his captor's side, then twisted round to throw him off. He then spun round, delivering a long reverse kick to the jaw of the knifeman. By the time his foot returned to the ground, he had drawn his Browning, and shot his erstwhile captor twice. The stunned knifeman flailed amongst the dustbins where he had landed, trying to regain his footing. Li shot him in the head while he had the chance.

Bracing himself against the wall to catch his breath, Li looked around for the woman, but she was nowhere in sight.

He ran to the end of the alley, looking out into Bubbling Well Road, but there were too many people drifting around the street for him to pick her out. He turned to go back into the opium den, pausing only to kick out at one of the brain-spattered dustbins. Two Sikhs were

coming down the stairs as he ascended, and he paused to allow them past. 'Two dead in the alley,' he told them in passing.

By the time he reached the dark and cramped den, the smoke had gone along with the occupants, though the smell still prickled at the breathing passages. The Sikh sergeant was scouting around behind the curtained-off partition. Li ducked inside, and found himself in a small shrine. A few tiny tapestries hung on the walls, and a small platter of food was on a low table before a small obsidian statuette of a grinning dragon with emerald eyes. A circular mirror, its octagonal frame inscribed with a pattern from *The Book of Changes*, formed the centrepiece to the back of the altar. A pallid body lay on the floor, a few feet from the stone wall.

Li was surprised: the body was that of a white man, with wispy grey hairs around his liverspotted pate. It wasn't that the westerners didn't indulge in opium – Victor Sassoon had built his fortune upon it, and now owned more property in the city than anyone else – but they usually did so in their own exclusive clubs and lounges. They certainly wouldn't come to a Chinese den and mingle with the locals.

Li turned the body over onto its back. He evidently had not been dead for long, as his skin still held a reasonably lifelike colour, and was only slightly cool to the touch. The limbs still flexed as Li moved him, though with the sluggishness and resistance of encroaching rigor. The front of his shirt and trousers were sticky with drying blood, though there was only a small patch on the floor. A few small footprints were to one side, and Li shuddered at the thought of what this woman might be teaching her offspring.

The sergeant poked at the torn shirt with a pen, exposing thin, wavery wounds. 'Stabbed, by the look of him.' Li didn't need to be told that; he'd seen such wounds every other day for most of his adult life. 'Stomach and maybe up under the ribs.'

'Any sign of a weapon?'

'Lots of weapons. Whether any of them was the one that did this...'
The sergeant looked round at the obsidian dragon, which leered as if drinking the taste of blood in the air. 'Could this be some sort of sacrifice?' The sergeant at least had the good sense to sound sheepish as he spoke.

'No. We don't do that sort of thing.' He didn't think so, anyway, though there were so many gods that he supposed some demanded

sacrifices. He had never come across such a case, however. 'Besides, look at the wounds, and the small amount of blood here. He must have been killed somewhere else, and then brought in here.'

'There were no blood trails outside this room.'

'Perhaps they carried him in a sack.' Couldn't the sergeant see that poking holes in his theories wasn't going to let him concentrate? 'He must have been attacked quite near here; the body's very fresh. The street outside, perhaps.'

The sergeant gave him a disdainful look, then shrugged.

'I'll have the area searched, but we won't find anything.'

Li knew the sergeant was right, of course; the Tongs were very adept at concealing their activities whenever they felt it was worth their while to bother. That knowledge didn't free the police from their obligations, though. 'All right. I'll go and have words with the prisoners. Let me know what you find.'

He looked around the grimy little room, and noticed that some blood was seeping around his shoe. He shook it off with a grimace. 'This is going to be one of those nights.'

* * *

From the gap between two rain-barrels, Yan Cheh watched with fascinated interest as a beautiful young woman hurried over to a waiting Studebaker. The driver held open the door so that the woman could put down the child she was carrying and assist him inside. The driver was a tall and muscular man with an angular, pockmarked face and shaggy hair. He took a last look around before getting in the car, which set off along Bubbling Well Road.

Yan Cheh stepped around the barrels, and looked back towards the bar on the corner. A couple of Sikhs were looking either way along the street. Yan Cheh was not surprised they hadn't spotted their quarry: she'd made the journey from the bar to her rendezvous with remarkable speed. Still, at least he still had them in sight.

He wheeled out the Zundapp motorcycle which had been hidden behind a fruit stall, and swung himself onto it. Ignoring the Sikhs down the road, he set off after the Studebaker.

Hsien-Ko allowed her eyelids to droop over her jade eyes; it had been

a long and tiring day, and the motion of the car was surprisingly relaxing, despite the occasional bump. 'What happened, Ah-Kwok?'

'Just bad luck, as far as we can tell. A random spot-check. Did it go well?'

'As well as can be expected. Have you arranged transportation to the Jade Emperor?'

'There's a wide path to the Daizong Archway. It's large enough to accommodate the trucks, though we ourselves can go much higher up the mountain.'

Hsien-Ko nodded. 'Laying the cables should prove an interesting experience but I'm sure it'll do.'

'I hoped you'd approve.' Kwok couldn't keep the smile from his face.

She matched his expression. 'Miss me?'

'Always.'

'Naturally. Take me home now, but dispose of this car first; it may have been seen.'

'Of course, beloved.'

* * *

It had been a long night, and even though the air was now clearer, Inspector Li felt as if his head was stuffed with cotton wool. He had supervised the removal of the body from the small shrine and now prowled around the cleared opium den.

He knew he should be working out the details of the case, but couldn't help thinking about getting back home for a long rest.

The main part of the den was just a squalid empty room, and he had soon turned his attention back to the shrine. The obsidian dragon unnerved him, as its jewelled eyes seemed to glow from within. He turned it round to face the wall, hoping that he would no longer be able to feel the malice it exuded. It was a strange idol; not one of the gods or dragons that he recognized. A regional patron deity, perhaps. He made a mental note to enquire about that; it might help track down the owner if he knew where the person was from.

There were still marks of dried blood on the floor, and he followed

them back from where the body had lain against the wall. That was odd; it was just a plain old brick wall, yet the trail led from it as if it were a door. As far as Li could work out there was only empty air and a twenty-foot drop on the other side, but he tapped at it anyway.

There was no hollow sound to indicate any hidden passages. Shaking his head, Li turned to go, then paused as something caught his eye. A corner of paper or card was poking out from under the shrine's low altar.

He retrieved it quickly. The name on it was that of one of the men they had arrested, but more interesting was its nature.

It was a dock worker's pass to Gongpinglu Wharf. That was a dockyard on the northern bank of the Huangpu just after it turned east, not far from the foreign embassies.

The various western governments were forever conspiring against each other, Li knew, so perhaps one of them was also involved. At any rate, this was the only clue he had as to where the escaped suspects might have either come from or gone to. He slipped the card into his pocket before leaving the opium den.

* * *

Nang Tao airfield was enclosed by a vast wire fence some nine feet high. A Tarmac runway was clearly visible against the surrounding grass, while mown strips of the field provided an informal landing area for smaller and sturdier aircraft. Off to one side, lights gleamed in the square and ugly concrete terminal with its wide barred windows. Hangars with colourful airline logos and slogans were arrayed beyond that, while a large arch stretched over the entrance for paying customers.

The Doctor crouched by the fence, Romana and K9 beside him. 'You are sure it reads as being here?' the Doctor asked.

Romana held up the tracer, which ticked softly. 'So it would appear.'

'All right. It'll be quicker to cut our way through than go all the way round to the main gate...' K9 powered up the blaster set into his snout. It would take only two seconds to burn through a wide enough range of wires with momentary sparks to allow them to pass through. The Doctor clapped a hand over the metal snout. 'The light might be seen.' He patted his pockets, then produced a small pair of wire-cutters from somewhere. 'Stealth and subtlety, eh?' He set to work, clipping rapidly

at the links in the fence.

After a couple of minutes, he was able to pull away a roughly circular section of the fence and crawl through. He turned. 'Come on, K9, don't dawdle.'

K9 slid through smoothly, then paused, scanning the area just in case. 'Metallic mass detected, master. Halfway along the runway.'

'Later, K9. You next, Romana.' Nothing happened, so the Doctor stuck his head back through the fence. 'Romana? Romana? Why is it that the simplest thing –' A discreet cough attracted his attention, and he looked up to see Romana standing beside him.

'If you weren't so lazy, we could have been at the source by now. It's not as if it's a very high fence.'

The Doctor rocked back on his heels. 'You climbed the fence?'

'Of course.'

'Ah.' The Doctor nodded to himself. 'You know I hate to sound negative, but what if it had been electrified, eh?'

'Then you would have been electrocuted when you cut the first wire, and I'd have got K9 to cut a way through.'

'That's very thoughtful of you.'

'You're the one that's supposed to be reckless, according to everyone at the Academy. I just thought I'd –'

'Reckless?!' The Doctor shot to his feet. 'Me? I'm not reckless. Just sort of... informal. Try the tracer now.'

She did so, and the instrument ticked softly. She pointed.

'That way, on the runway.'

The Doctor wandered along the middle of the runway, peering from side to side. 'Well, there's nothing here now.'

His foot rattled against something with a metallic scraping.

'Wait a minute.' He bent down as Romana and K9 hurried to join him. The Doctor had lifted a gleaming metal object from the Tarmac. It was a knife of some kind, with a blade so slim it was almost needle-like.

The Doctor tentatively touched the blade, his fingers coming away darkened. 'Blood,' he murmured. 'Still quite fresh. Give me the tracer.' Romana handed it over silently, and the Doctor held it to the knife. The tracer ticked faintly. The Doctor tried holding it over the bloodied portion of the blade, but this made no difference.

'It's obviously not the fourth segment,' Romana told him.

'No. It may have been in contact with it recently, though.'

He frowned, turning the knife over in his hands, then offered it to K9. 'What do you make of this?'

K9's probe antenna reached out towards the knife. 'The blood is human, of type O negative. Weapon has a four-inch hilt and eight-inch blade, and weighs seventy-two grammes.

The blade is composed of an alloy of unniloctium and nitinol, and will be triggered by the victim's body heat.'

'What?' The Doctor stared down at the knife, wide-eyed.

'Unniloctium and nitinol, are you certain of that, K9?'

K9's antennae whirred briefly. 'Affirmative, master. Metallurgical analysis double-checked and confirmed.'

'Is something wrong?' Romana asked.

'Probably,' the Doctor answered in a very low voice, without any of his customary humour. 'Unniloctium is a natural element, but nitinol was artificially created – and neither of them will be discovered for a good half-century or so.'

'Nineteen eighty-four and the late nineteen seventies respectively, mistress,' K9 supplied helpfully.

'Yes,' the Doctor went on thoughtfully. 'The unniloctium might have been discovered and then forgotten, since it is a natural element on this planet, but not the nitinol.'

Romana looked at the knife. 'Are those metals found on any other planets with spacefaring capabilities, K9?'

'Affirmative, mistress. Unniloctium deposits are found in trace amounts in many G-class star systems. Nitinol is currently used by the Draconian Empire, the Kaldanati, the Lamerdines, the Sauriate

Alliance, and the Xatrox.'

'Any of whom would stand out like a sore thumb on this planet.' The Doctor straightened and peered at a large metallic mass K9 had noticed on first scan. 'Aha. Come on.' He led them down to the end of the runway. A car sat there, its black paint providing excellent camouflage out on the darkened landing field.

The doors were open but no one was inside. The Doctor laid a hand on the bonnet. 'The engine's still warm.' He climbed halfway into the car, then withdrew, and ushered K9 forward. 'Spots of blood on the seat, K9; are they from the same person as the blood on the knife?'

K9 whirred slightly. 'Affirmative, master. Genetic match one hundred per cent.'

'Yes, I thought as much...'

'Doctor?' Romana started measuring off paces between the car and the spot where they had found the knife.

'What?'

'The knife was here, and presumably was dropped after abandoning the car, right?'

'Right.'

'Why go along the runway? We'd have seen or heard a plane take off; they could have parked right next to another car if they wanted to swap vehicles, or they could have run off into the darkness. Why didn't they?'

'And where did they go?' The Doctor strolled around in a small circle, peering alternately at the ground and the sky.

'Hyperspace?'

He stopped and shot her a look. 'That wasn't very funny.'

* * *

Yan Cheh ran a finger around the edge of the ragged hole in the fence. Had the couple from the Studebaker cut their way out here? It didn't seem likely; the grass was flattened more on the outside where they had knelt to cut through.

There was an odd trail beside the footprints of a man and a woman. Rather than being the child's prints, it was a continuous strip, as if some square box had been dragged along. The grass was flattened pointing in towards the runway, which meant it certainly wasn't his quarry.

He heard voices approaching, and swiftly leapt onto his Zundapp, since there was no convenient cover in which to hide. He would make more discreet enquiries later, he promised himself.

Three

The Club Do-San was at the southern end of the riverside road known as the Bund, down by the old Chinese city. It was enclosed in a wedge-shaped Georgian style edifice on a corner just north of Shilipu Wharf. It shared a rear loading area with the Shanghai Club – a very classy British-only gentlemen's club with a marble-floored hallway that was almost as large as New York's Grand Central station.

The Club Do-San was equally ostentatious, but in a more discreet way. Once through any of the three arched double doors on the curved façade, a visitor would find himself in a thickly carpeted vestibule bounded by a reception desk as impressive as those in any of the city's hotels. A maze of shelves and hangers for hats and coats stretched out behind the desk, and flowing staircases beyond led up to the dining floor or down to the less formal dance floor.

The immaculately uniformed boys behind the desk nodded respectfully as their employer strolled casually in and went straight over towards the stairs. The owner of the Club Do-San had no such qualms over patronage as did the powers that be in the Shanghai Club. He had carefully made it very public that as far as he was concerned, money was money, regardless of whose wallet it was in. A short but lean figure with a shaggy fringe, he was known by his staff simply as Mr Woo.

He knew that they sometimes wondered whether he even had a given name – which of course he had – but it appealed to his sense of humour to let them wonder.

The face under the thick fringe was only slightly too lean to be truly baby-faced and his almost black eyes glittered keenly.

He wore a dinner suit, to reassure his staff that he too knew the value of a neat and formal appearance. He skipped down the short flight of steps and through into the lounge. Informal tables were scattered around the edges of the polished dance floor, under the overhanging floor of the formal dining area. A set of seats for musicians were arrayed around a small stage at the far end of the floor, which also incorporated an elaborately sculpted fountain. A long bar with oak and brass fittings ran the length of the wall to the left, with the prices of exotic cocktails listed on framed notices.

Woo palmed a toothpick from a holder on the nearest table, and set it

into the corner of his mouth. He had never smoked, but he found that this slight gesture tended to put at ease those who did, as well as discouraging them from offering him any cigarettes. He wasn't sure why this worked, but was glad that it did.

He nodded to the nearest diner with a smile, and continued down to the dance floor. The day was barely begun, so only a few patrons – mostly from the American Concession, which was the nearest – were at the bar. He passed them with a smile and a wave, and circled round to the oak-panelled door set into the rear of the fountain's marble base.

It opened with the key attached to his watch chain and he slipped through into a wood-panelled corridor. A quite modern office was at the end where Woo conducted most of his business. It was a dogleg-shaped room with fans hanging from the ceiling. The gleaming chromed shelves and racks blended well with the inlaid ivory and wood furnishings and delicate statuary. The only decoration on the walls was a framed death certificate which never failed to send Woo into a contemplative mood.

Woo poured himself a cup of strong coffee from a small crockery set on one of the chromed racks and relaxed into the plush leather armchair behind the desk. One panel on the desk slid aside at a touch, revealing a row of numbered lights with a socket below each. Woo noticed that only a couple of the lights were glowing, and the numbers identifying them were those of tables occupied by the few westerners who were in this early.

None of them seemed very interesting, so he closed the panel and turned to the booking folder. The club would be quite full as usual tonight, he noted, though he didn't see any very noteworthy names among them. There was a German coming in, he noticed, which was reasonably unusual. He had booked a table for an early evening dinner, and expected a guest named Kwok, according to the booking slip.

Woo lifted the telephone. 'Rondo? A German called Vogler is due in this evening. Give him table number seven, and let me know when he arrives.'

* * *

The Doctor and Romana sat in a small coffee shop, with K9 out of the way under the table. Romana eyed the selection of steamed rice,

vegetable and bean curd suspiciously, though K9's sensors had reported that they were non-toxic. 'Are you sure this is safe?'

'Of course. It doesn't really matter; we only need it to blend in.'

'For a moment there, I thought you were going to order the snake and duck's feet.'

The Doctor made a face. 'I had enough of that sort of thing with Nero.'

'I didn't realize that humans ate those sorts of things.'

The Doctor looked around. 'Beggars can't be choosers; you have a quarter of the planet's population living on a tenth of the world's arable land here. The result is musical chairs along the food chain. Did you try the tracer again?'

She shrugged, and pulled the tracer from her sleeve. It still only ticked softly.

The Doctor cocked his head. 'It doesn't sound much like the fourth segment to me.'

'No. But what else could it be? Perhaps someone else has found a way of exploiting the powers of that segment, and the tracer's reacting to its use. I don't suppose it could be shielded when not in use, to hide it from the tracer?'

'That's what I've been wondering, and it's not a pleasant thought.'

'Because it would imply knowledge of how both the key and the tracer operate?'

'Exactly. And who would know the limitations of Guardian technology better than a Guardian?'

Romana nodded, letting out a long breath. 'You're right, that isn't a pleasant thought.'

The Doctor started to pace, then realized that it was attracting people's attention, and sat down with a self-conscious cough. 'There was no one in that car, but the engine was still warm...I don't know about you, but I would say that suggests that someone got out and went somewhere without our seeing them.'

'Vivien Fay used the third segment for interstitial transference into hyperspace – perhaps someone else has found a way of doing the same

thing.'

'Or it could all be one big coincidence...Let's test a theory.'

He got up, and stepped out onto the grey street that was festooned with colourful banners.

Romana and K9 followed, other diners drawing back nervously from the latter. 'Where are we going?'

'Back to the TARDIS. I want to try something.'

* * *

The Settlement Police headquarters was a suitably imposing building that wouldn't have looked out of place in the City of London. The interior was just as impressive, Li thought, with the commissioner's office looking like a government minister's. It had a solid wooden desk as massive as any neolithic altar, and delicate watercolours on the panelled walls.

Commissioner Gibson himself was bald, with a drooping moustache, and looked fitter than his fifty-odd years would have led Li to expect. A serving boy had laid out some tea and biscuits on a low table to one side of the office, and Li and Gibson sat on either side of it rather than at the main desk.

This was, after all, an informal meeting.

'So,' Gibson said pleasantly, 'you think this is a new group running opium through Shanghai?'

'Not new, just returning after a long time, I think. It won't last long.' Li took a sip of tea. 'The Tongs are like clouds – they join, break up, mix together, swirl around... This one's temporary, I can feel it.'

'Feelings and hunches might be good enough for Dashiell Hammett's characters, but in the real world...'

'Call it a judgement based on past experience, then.'

Analysis of past trends was an excellent tool for the police, Li had found; efficient and recordable for future reference.

'Then what do you think their future plans will encompass?'

Li had been waiting for this. 'I found a worker's dock pass among the

rubbish lying around, so it looks like they're running some sort of operation out of Gongpinglu Wharf. I have men watching the area to make sure. When they go to make their deals, we will have them.'

The commissioner nodded. 'Good. I'd hate to think the crime rate in my jurisdiction was going up.' He looked up with a quirked eyebrow and half smile. 'Unfortunately, there is another...oddity.'

Li was not entirely surprised, though he was disappointed.

For 'oddity' he knew, read 'loose end'. 'Sir?'

'The body you found has been identified. We contacted both the address from his wallet, and London's Metropolitan Police. This man was the caretaker of a private museum in London, who was reported missing last night by the owner.'

'Last night?' Li looked puzzled. 'There must be some mistake – they've miscounted the International Date Line or –'

'He was last seen alive,' the commissioner interrupted firmly, 'at six in the evening, local time. That's about two in the morning here.'

Li was lost for words. 'But our raid was at three! Are you telling me that this man was alive in London an hour before we found him dead here?'

'The first thing that one learns in criminology, Inspector, is that nothing is impossible to the determined criminal mind.'

'Maybe so, but if I had found a way to travel six thousand eight hundred miles in under an hour, I could probably think of more profitable uses for it than hiding dead caretakers.'

Pulling himself together, Li realized there was an obvious explanation for the discrepancy. 'Are they sure it was the same man?'

Gibson shrugged. 'It seems unlikely. There must have been some sort of switch for some reason. The man in London may have been an impostor, perhaps blackmailing his employer in order to gain access to his business – importing exhibits via here could cover opium smuggling. With the original hostage dead, the impostor has probably just gone to ground. The Metropolitan police are searching for him.'

Li considered this; it was very kind of the commissioner to be so honest. 'Hopefully we'll get some answers at Gongpinglu Wharf.'

‘Yes...’ Li could sense the condition coming; not even honesty came free in this world. ‘I’ll have a detachment of Sikhs join your men. With the victim being a British subject, we do have a duty to observe.’

‘Of course, sir.’ Li didn’t much care; catching the culprits and prosecuting them was all that bothered him. That was what the police were for.

* * *

The Doctor closed the TARDIS doors once Romana and K9 were inside. He held out his hand like a surgeon waiting for a scalpel. ‘Give me the tracer.’

Raising an eyebrow curiously, Romana handed it over. The Doctor slotted it into its socket on the console, and held up his hand in a ‘just wait’ gesture. ‘Right. Just to double-check...’

He threw the dematerialization switch.

* * *

Woo had emerged from his office to join Rondo in drawing up duty rosters for the staff. It was a boring job, but these things had to be done. When they had finished, they went on their daily tour of the club, checking that everything was clean and up to standard.

Although the club was ostensibly a nightclub, it was open during the day, albeit without entertainments. Woo had a regular cadre of customers who came in for lunch, and some people would drink at any time of the day.

There was an indignant cry from a distant corner of the ground floor; Woo looked over to see what the trouble was. A group of men in Victorian-looking suits with wing-collared shirts were arguing furiously with one of their number. A scattering of ivory mah-jong pieces made a stark contrast to the mahogany table at which they were seated. Rondo flicked his eyes from Woo to the door. Woo considered letting Rondo throw the men out, but he had a certain responsibility here.

Besides, only the Japanese wore such archaically formal suits these days.

He walked over to the table and sat down. The Japanese glared. ‘We did not give you permission to sit here,’ one of them grumbled.

‘I own the club; did I give you permission to sit here?’

There was no answer. ‘Perhaps mah-jong is a little confusing for you.’ Woo produced a deck of cards from an inside pocket.

‘I suspect you might prefer poker.’

‘Really?’

‘Everyone likes to gamble, but the Japanese...Bluffing comes naturally, does it not?’ Woo shuffled the cards, then started dealing them one-handed, a flick of the thumb sending each card to its allotted player. The Japanese looked at each other uncertainly.

‘We do not bluff.’

‘No? I assume you’ve paid a visit to Manchukuo on your journeys.’ It would be odd if they had not. Their uniform haircuts gave them away as young officers. ‘You’ve owned it since the last war.’

‘What if we have?’ The man who had done all the speaking scooped up his cards, glaring at them as if to transfer his irritation onto them.

‘It was threatened by trade strangulation once the Russians built a railway from Europe to the Pacific port of Vladivostok.

Seeking an excuse to expand further into China to seek the natural resources it needed, you engineered a fight between Japanese and Chinese troops.’

‘We were attacked first!’ The young officer tossed a handful of banknotes into the centre of the table. His companions did likewise. Woo kept a straight face, though he was glad to see that he had picked an argument with the right man. This one was clearly the leader.

‘I wouldn’t have called that a good reason to invade northeast China.’

‘That was six years ago. It ended when Pu Yi was enthroned as ruler of the new state of Manchukuo.’

‘Ended? Then why did I see Japanese troops on the streets here in 1932? If the western powers hadn’t threatened to intervene to protect their trading centre, we might not be talking.’

‘That would be worth it,’ one of the others muttered, tossing his cards away.

The leader grunted. ‘Such courage, though, to attack such a larger foe.’

Woo hadn’t had the chance to bait a Japanese officer for a long time, and was enjoying it thoroughly. ‘Such foolishness, to fail. Larger, but weaker.’ He drew another card, recalling the reports of what had happened. In Japan itself, the army had split into two factions, the Kodo Ha and the Tosei Ha. The Sakura Kai, or Cherry Society, controlled the Kodo Ha, and was in favour of further expansion out of Manchukuo and into China. The Tosei Ha preferred to obey strict guidelines and seek more formal rules of engagement. The Sakura Kai and Kodo Ha controlled the local commanders in Manchukuo and engineered the assassinations of various ministers, including prime ministers from 1933 to 1935 in an attempt to get their way in Japan. In February 1936 the Kodo Ha’s supporters revolted openly in Tokyo. The revolt was put down. The Kodo Ha still controlled the local commanders in Manchukuo. ‘You used a provoked fight with a handful of Chinese troops at Marco Polo Bridge as an excuse to invade again last month. Have you no imagination?’

‘We were –’

‘Attacked first, so you said. Strange that you still come here to socialize. With the army already in action, the government had no choice but to move to a war footing – a bluff, as I said.’

The Japanese officer laid his cards face up. He had a full house. ‘We do not bluff.’

‘So you said.’ Woo spread his cards. A straight flush, Queen high. The Japanese officer reddened, leaping to his feet.

His hand reached inside his jacket as he cursed, but a blow from Rondo’s tree-like arm sent him sprawling to the floor. A Nambu skidded across the dance floor. Woo had also stood, a Browning automatic pistol appearing in his hand as if by magic. ‘Go back to the Tokyo Army Club and tell your friends from the Staff College that they just don’t make officers like they used to.’

He nodded to Rondo. ‘Now you can throw them out.’

* * *

The time rotor at the heart of the TARDIS console had risen encouragingly, then sank back and remained still. Romana looked at the navigational displays. ‘I don’t think we’ve moved at all.’

The Doctor opened the scanner's shutters. The view outside was still that of Waibaidu bridge, though the sun was now setting. 'We've skipped forward to dusk, but that's about it. Is the tracer showing anything?'

'Faint activity from due east of here, along the river.'

The Doctor remained silent, as if he hadn't heard, then threw the door lever. 'Right! We can cut through the British Public Gardens. K9: guard duty – stay.'

'Shouldn't we take him along for protection?'

'He's far too conspicuous; you saw how everybody looked at him earlier.' The Doctor pulled the tracer from its socket and handed it back to Romana. 'Besides, dogs aren't allowed in the park.' He frowned. 'Neither are the Chinese...'

* * *

Kwok could feel the eyes of the Club Do-San's maître d' on him from the moment he stepped into the lobby. The maître d' was a good seven feet tall, with a bony chin that was almost as expansive as his bulging forehead. He looked as though he were wearing armour under his dinner jacket, though Kwok knew that this was not the case.

Kwok moved lightly up the wide staircase to the dining area, and passed through it to the tables overlooking the dance floor. A girl with elaborately coiffured hair was singing 'Begin the Beguine' in lilting tones to the accompaniment of a band who were arrayed round the sculpted fountain. Although most of the song was in Mandarin, the actual words 'begin the beguine' were in English, since there was naturally no Chinese word for beguine. Kwok ignored her, dutifully reminding himself that he was a happily engaged man.

One European in a grey suit was sitting alone at a table by the balcony, half watching the other patrons while trying not to miss any of the girl's slinky movements. Amateur, Kwok decided. It didn't matter to him, though; Hsien-Ko had made her views on this deal clear, and he wasn't going to disappoint her.

He sat beside the European. 'Herr Vogler?'

The European looked around suspiciously, his blubbery face flushed. 'You are...?'

‘I am Kwok. You have a business deal with Hsien-Ko.’

‘Yes, Herr Kwok. You are her negotiator?’

‘For tonight.’ Kwok snapped his fingers at a waiter.

‘Tsingtao beer.’ The waiter nodded and hurried off ‘Very well, Herr Vogler. Have you brought the materials which Hsien-Ko has offered to buy?’

‘Of course; I would not be here otherwise. Do you have the price that was asked?’

‘Naturally.’ Was he trying to impugn Hsien-Ko’s honour?, Probably not; these westerners just didn’t understand respect or face. ‘She recommends a direct exchange; your wares for ours.’

‘The exchange will be made at Gongpinglu Wharf as we suggested?’

Kwok’s leathery face split into a professional smile. ‘It was an excellent choice. We approve. We will bring our payment to the wharf at midnight. I suggest you and your people be ready.’

‘We will be.’ Vogler drained his glass, and rose. ‘Until midnight, Herr Kwok.’

Kwok nodded, and Vogler left as the waiter returned with Kwok’s sparkling beer. ‘Bring a telephone.’ The waiter hurried off again, and Kwok relaxed slightly. He was reminded of his first meeting with Hsien-Ko. That had been in a club not unlike this one, albeit smaller and less classy. He had been a bouncer then and she had been making such deals with the likes of Vogler. Things had been simpler then, but no less satisfying.

He sipped his beer as the singer began a new song. The confirmation of the deal would please Hsien-Ko, and that was what mattered.

Four

A couple of grubbily dressed stevedores were sitting around a brazier with a coffee pot when Li arrived on the wharf. He had come dressed in similarly disreputable clothes so as not to arouse suspicion, and knew that the other officers who were already at the wharf and in hiding had also come in disguise.

It had taken him some time to decide what to wear; the very idea of clothing himself in anything that was not properly washed and pressed smacked of laziness. At first he had tried to assemble a suitably grimy set of rags, but it was obvious even to him that the mixture was too methodical, and so clearly false. That meant that there was a danger that others could spot it as false, too.

In the end, he had confiscated the clothes of a genuine dock worker roughly his size, who had been arrested earlier for drunkenness. You couldn't get more authentic than the real thing. He only hoped the British had enough sense to keep the Sikhs in hiding in their truck as he had instructed: one flash of a uniform, and the suspects would never arrive.

He had brought a simple canvas sack with him, just as the other workers would have for their snacks. Li's, however, contained a torch, a camera for photographing any evidence that might need to be verified as untampered with later, and a Very pistol with which to signal his men to move in. He hoped it wouldn't be a long wait: the sooner he got rid of these filthy rags and into something more respectable, the better.

* * *

The British Public Gardens were on the northern shore of the Huangpu just along from where the TARDIS had landed. A Sikh guard had been standing in a sentry box by the gate, opposite a sign which read 'No dogs or Chinamen'. The Doctor and Romana, not being Chinese, had had no difficulty in making their way through. Once through the peaceful park, they had continued onwards, following the eastward curve of the Huangpu along towards the easternmost docks which were halfway between the city and the sea.

Cars and small vans passed occasionally as the docks were constantly in use, even at night. A few workers gave them odd looks as they passed through the main gate, but they went unchallenged. The necks

of steel cranes poked above the long roofs of various warehouses and workshops. 'It's a large place,' Romana said quietly.

'Ships from all over the planet come here. If someone is messing around with the fourth segment, though, they'll want to do it somewhere that isn't too busy.' He looked around.

'Try the tracer now.'

Romana activated the device, which ticked softly when pointed east. 'The far end of the docks.'

'Probably a smaller dock; one that isn't important enough to use this late at night.' He started off along some rails set into the cobbles, whistling the theme to *Popeye*. As they moved, they saw fewer workers, and the shadows around the decreasing number of illuminated buildings grew deeper and darker. The Doctor stopped whistling. 'Stay on your guard. This isn't a very friendly area.'

'I had gathered that.'

They moved on towards a large building whose windows were mostly broken. A sharp hiss ahead made the pair stop in their tracks as a match flickered into brief life. The Doctor and Romana pressed themselves against the dark side of the building as a man slouched round the corner. In the light from the match with which he was lighting a cigarette, they could see the glint of a Thompson submachine gun that was held in the crook of his arm.

The man paused to look around, then turned and wandered back beyond the corner. The Doctor and Romana let out sighs of relief. 'I see what you mean,' Romana whispered. 'He didn't look very friendly. He was obviously a guard of some kind, but what was he guarding?'

'Something on the other side of this building, obviously.'

The Doctor sidled a few feet along the wall, then stopped with a muffled groan. 'Maybe he was guarding the lights that should be illuminating this fire-escape! Come on.' He scrambled up the iron staircase in a matter of moments. While Romana followed, he bent to listen at the door at the top.

'What's inside?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'I can't hear a thing. Probably a mimes' convention.' He made a few adjustments to his sonic screwdriver and

opened the door. The space inside was pitch-black, though a few patches of moonlight formed grey windows on the floor below. The door itself seemed to have opened onto a wide upper catwalk. More dim greyness formed squares on the far wall, as the moonlight shone into a windowed upper office.

Treading carefully, the Doctor and Romana made their way round to the office. It was a small wood-walled cubbyhole with interior windows overlooking the floor below and exterior ones overlooking the wharf outside the building. 'This must have been some kind of customs office,' the Doctor said, 'but it looks as if it's the maid's year off.'

'Dust is the least of our concerns; there are men with guns out there, remember?'

'Exactly; and now we have a grandstand view of what they're up to.'

* * *

Li ducked back into the shadows under a crane as a trio of Opel Maultier trucks rumbled slowly around the corner of the warehouse. The trucks ground to a halt at the foot of one of the saurian cranes that reached out across the waterfront. Men jumped down from the backs of the vehicles and pulled their tarpaulin covers aside.

Two men who were waiting amidst a junction of rails a short distance away began to approach. The cab doors opened, and a trio of Europeans emerged to meet the others halfway.

Fortunately the night was quiet and Li could just about make out their footsteps, which meant he would possibly hear their speech as well.

'I see you're very punctual,' the leader of the waiting men said smoothly. He was lean with a pockmarked face and shaggy hair.

The European in the pale suit nodded. 'Naturally, Herr Kwok. I'm told we value efficiency more than anything. Where is she?'

'On her way. In our business, it pays to be careful.'

Yan Cheh listened with interest. He had recognized Kwok at once as the driver who had been waiting with the Studebaker for that oddly familiar woman in Bubbling Well Road. He wondered if she would turn up tonight as well.

He was perched on a warehouse roof directly above the leading truck and so had an excellent view of the proceedings.

His sources had informed him of an unusual meeting to take place with a man called Vogler and some other Europeans, but he had scarcely dared imagine that the mysterious pair from last night would be the other party involved.

Whatever was going on, they certainly weren't common thieves, so perhaps they weren't his problem anyway. He had to be sure, however. His ruminations were interrupted by the sound of a powerful engine erupting into life in the middle of the harbour. Looking across, he could make out the lights of a boat surging across the water towards the wharf. It was odd that he hadn't noticed its presence there already, but he had had other things on his mind.

The engine sound faded away as a motor launch of highly polished wood coasted in towards a jetty at the foot of the quayside steps. Several figures in the tiny shelter deck behind the wheelhouse were already bracing themselves for the imminent halt. One was unmistakably the same white-coated girl he had followed from Bubbling Well Road to Nang Tao; very slight, but carrying herself with remarkable confidence and purpose.

With her were a couple of coolies and a passenger so unexpected that Yan Cheh wondered if he were hallucinating – an older woman in a nursemaid's blue uniform, with a pram.

The coolies secured the launch, while Kwok lowered a set of steps to the boat. The younger woman paused to speak inaudibly to the nursemaid and check the pram, then ascended to the dockside. Kwok led her over towards the trucks where the Europeans were waiting.

* * *

The tracer's crackles were already fading by the time Romana had fixed the direction it was indicating. It had returned to that steady ticking in a matter of moments. 'It's reading due south.'

The Doctor peered out of the dusty customs office window.

'Just the direction that boat came from.'

'Could the fourth segment be on board?'

'Anything's possible.'

‘We should have brought K9. Perhaps his sensors could have told us something.’

‘Time to use our own sensors, I think.’ Romana gave him a puzzled look as he held out his hand for the tracer.

‘Out there? Are you mad?’

‘Shh. Stealth and subtlety, remember?’

* * *

The westerner in the pale suit doffed his hat with the slightest of bows. ‘Good evening, fräulein,’ the leader began. ‘It is a pleasure to see you and Herr Kwok once more.’

Hsien-Ko nodded pleasantly. ‘I’m sure it is, Herr Vogler. I trust the wait hasn’t been too unpleasant.’

‘Tolerable. You are prepared to do business?’

‘Naturally. You have my purchases?’

Vogler nodded and waved to two of his companions who brought forward a pair of crates and set them down. Vogler opened the larger crate’s lid, and lifted out the tubular frame of a submachine gun. Unlike the weapons with which Kwok was familiar, there was no wood anywhere in its construction.

‘Next year’s model, MP 38. Made by Ermawerke in Erfurt, it’ll be issued first to the Bodyguard next year.’ He handed it over to Hsien-Ko. Kwok opened the smaller crate. It was full of rectangular magazines. Kwok picked one up, weighing it in his hand. ‘Twenty-five rounds each,’ Vogler told him.

Hsien-Ko examined the MP 38 closely, working the mechanism experimentally. ‘Interesting. How many have you brought?’

Vogler shrugged. ‘Six hundred, plus six hundred thousand rounds of ammunition.’

Hsien-Ko’s head tilted slightly. ‘The deal was for a thousand guns and one million rounds.’

Vogler spread his hands. ‘These haven’t even been issued in Germany yet. Security surrounding the factory is outrageous. If the authorities even began to think that extra numbers have been made and smuggled

out of the country, I'd be hanged immediately.'

Hsien-Ko passed the gun to Kwok. 'Isn't the price I'm paying you worth that risk?'

Vogler looked away briefly. 'Not quite, no.'

Hsien-Ko gazed at him for a few moments. 'Then you'll understand if the payment is reduced by a similar percentage? Six hundred pounds of opium resin.'

'Perfectly understandable, *fräulein*.'

Yan Cheh slipped quietly along the roof, making for a rusty fire-escape. The purchase of so many guns would be beyond the scope of most of the Tongs, but not beyond the KMT.

They might simply be conducting underhand deals with the Germans to avoid putting the Americans' noses out of joint.

That being the case, the guns were unlikely to end up on the streets.

The door to the customs office below opened with the tiniest of creaks, and Yan Cheh froze. A tall westerner with curly hair and a ridiculously unseasonal scarf slipped out. The westerner looked around without even bothering to duck out of sight, and tiptoed down the fire-escape. A woman in a plain red skirt and top followed him.

Curious, and wondering if this might be a betrayal on the part of the Europeans, Yan Cheh dropped silently onto the canvas top of one of the empty trucks. From here he could take whatever action might be necessary.

* * *

Li waited with baited breath. The moment that the opium was brought out from that launch, he would have them. His ancestors would be proud of him for such a victory. He pulled the Very pistol from his bag, checking that a signal flare was already loaded.

Any moment now... A flicker of movement caught his eye: a tall man with curly hair was slipping out from the corner of the warehouse, and heading towards the crane just aft of the launch. No one else had noticed him yet, but the moment they did, everyone would vanish like the morning mist after sunrise. 'Damn!' he hissed, and quickly fired the Very pistol into the black sky. Sikhs and the other undercover

police immediately leapt out from behind the warehouse doors and the nests amid piles of dockside cargo.

* * *

Kwok slapped the palmed magazine into the MP 38 as Hsien-Ko glared at Vogler. The German was looking around with the expression of a startled rabbit. Clearly he was innocent of betrayal, or he wouldn't be so shocked. There was still the question of his being able to identify them, however, so Kwok opened fire anyway.

Vogler and his comrades barely had time to blink before they spun, dead, to the ground. Kwok replaced the empty magazine with another from the crate, and tossed the gun to Hsien-Ko, who caught it deftly. 'Good gun.'

The smugglers scattered as policemen swarmed into the open under the red light of the flare. A few gunshots boomed out across the wharf.

Hsien-Ko had frozen in mid-step, her head canted to look at the man with the scarf and curls. She started to frown, then her eyes widened in an expression of surprised recognition. 'It can't be...'

A policeman knocked the gun from her frozen hands, but Kwok speedily kicked him to the ground. 'Run!' Two more policemen took aim with their own guns, but Kwok hurriedly lifted their unconscious colleague as a shield. They held their fire, and Kwok ran forward to hurl their colleague bodily into them. He grabbed the arm of one, and cracked him on the chin with his elbow. The policeman's gun went off as he blacked out, and the shot blasted the other officer into the river before he could regain his balance.

Yan Cheh didn't know who the two westerners were, but it seemed they were definitely not with either Vogler or the Tong. Perhaps they too were friends of the Fallen Angel.

Kwok was blasting away at anyone who got in his way, and was already turning towards the western woman.

Yan Cheh wasn't about to let her be murdered, so he leapt upon Kwok from atop the truck. Both men fell, their hands locked around Kwok's gun. Kwok's eyes held a glint of obsession, or madness, and Yan Cheh recoiled from them. Yan Cheh twisted his head away as the gun went off with a flash, almost deafening him in his left ear. Kwok screamed, tumbling backwards and losing his grip on the gun. Yan Cheh saw that Kwok's right eye was obscured by blistered flesh where the muzzle

flash had seared the side of his face.

Yan Cheh leapt atop the nearest truck and scrambled for the warehouse roof before anyone saw him. The police were perfectly capable of dealing with everyone here.

The launch's engine roared into life, and the propellers churned the water white while it was still moored. Li ducked as a coolie flew at him, and the man hurtled over his shoulder and into the river. The woman had recovered her senses and bolted for the steps, while her shaggy-haired companion leapt feet-first at the nearest policeman.

Li took aim at the woman in the white overcoat, but soon caught another threat out of the corner of his eye. The uniformed nursemaid had reached into the blue and white pram and pulled out a Bren gun. She balanced the bipod mount atop the pram's canopy and opened fire. Police and gangsters alike dived for cover and Li ducked behind the crane's iron leg under a shower of sparks. One of his men quickly shot the gunner, who splashed overboard. The gun dropped back into the pram, but there was no cry from within.

When Li tried to aim again, the woman had abandoned her run for the too-distant jetty and was already arcing towards the water in a smooth dive from the quayside. The launch slipped her moorings, while the woman swam out to meet it. Li ran along the edge of the quayside until he had a clear shot at her back and raised his gun.

A loop of coloured wool abruptly wrapped itself around his hand, jerking the pistol out of his grip and into the water. Li turned, lashing out intinctively, and knocked the curly-haired *gwai lo* to the ground.

Li untangled the loop of scarf from his hand and watched with an irritating feeling of helplessness as the woman clambered aboard the accelerating motor launch. The westerner on the ground groaned, touching the back of his hand to his bleeding lip. Li glared at him in disgust.

‘Assaulting a police officer is a serious offence, as is gun-running.’

‘I suppose the phrase you’re looking for is "you’re nicked, squire"? It’s funny, you know, you don’t look particularly assaulted.’ He winced pointedly.

Li shoved him against the leg of the crane and started to rummage through the stranger’s pockets. It took only moments to come up with a knife, crusted with dried blood. ‘Someone does – I was investigating

a stabbing just this morning.'

'I found that knife –'

'Most people claim to have "found" wallets. Knives tend to get lost rather than found.' The presence of a knife-wielding westerner in connection with a case involving a stabbed westerner could hardly be coincidence.

The stranger turned round sharply. 'What's more important is that somebody seems to be operating a source of detectable temporal interference in your city.'

Li nodded towards a pair of his men who were restraining a tall dark-haired western woman in a red dress. 'You're the only ones I've seen interfering in anything.' Li beckoned to his men. 'Take these two back to the station for questioning.'

Five

The police station's main office was half empty and as colourless as the grey streets outside. As with those streets, though, there were plenty of posters and banners on the walls. The woman sat down wearily, while the man slouched into a chair and casually put his feet up on Li's immaculately neat desk. Li knocked them off with a rap from a ruler and sat down in front of his typewriter. He still smarted from losing the woman and was in an uncharacteristically vindictive mood which belied his open and friendly visage.

'Let's start with your names.'

'Well, I am the Doctor and this is Romana. We're just sort of passing through Shanghai, in a very temporal sense.'

'Your real names?'

'I'm not sure I could remember it, offhand.'

Li didn't find the man's attitude amusing. A Chinese prisoner would never be so foolish. 'Don't tell me you're going to plead amnesia?'

'No, it's just been so long since I last used it. Besides, names have power, Sung-Chi Li.'

Li started, but hastily composed himself. 'How do you know that?'

'You signed the charge sheet in front of you.'

'Most *gwai lo* can't read Chinese script.'

'Well, I've been around a bit, you know – *Gwai lo*... ghost man? I admit I've died a couple of times, but it doesn't look that serious, does it?'

Li was beginning to feel all too scrutable. 'Third time lucky?'

The Doctor grinned cheekily. 'I suppose it was.'

'Names?'

'Just put Doctor John Smith.' He looked at Romana with a shrug. 'I didn't choose it.'

Li glared at him suspiciously, half-expecting another correction, but none came. He wrote the name down, reflecting that the Doctor's childish attempts to put him off were almost certainly proof of guilt. The firing squad would have something to look forward to. 'And your full name?' he asked Romana.

Romana's mouth quirked upwards.

'Romanadvoratrelundar.'

'It's Polish,' the Doctor supplied helpfully.

'All right, now to business. What is your connection to the woman who was at the docks?'

'None, of course. We've only just arrived in the city.'

'So has she, as far as I know. Try again.'

'What possible reason could you have for thinking that we -'

'She seemed to recognize you, for one thing. And you did let her get away from me.'

The Doctor's expression darkened. 'Shooting unarmed women in the back is not what I'd call justice. I mean, what happened to all the processes you're supposed to go through first, eh? "Freeze. Stop or I shoot." Complex legal jargon like that.'

Romana nodded. 'How were we supposed to know you were policemen? You weren't in uniform.'

Li was tired and not really up to debating with the prisoners. As for their questions as to procedure, he found that gravely insulting. He had followed the regulations thoroughly.

'All right, if that's how you want to play it.' He beckoned to a uniformed officer near by. 'Empty their pockets and lock them up. They might be more talkative after a few hours with the other rats.'

The Doctor leaned forward to fix Li with a penetrating glare as the uniformed officer grabbed his arm. 'You're making a very big mistake, Inspector; someone is misusing energies that could blow this city halfway to Mars, and we're the only ones who might be able to help.'

'If you want to help, then start telling the truth.' Li waved and the uniformed officer dragged the Doctor off to the cell area. Romana

went rather more quietly, Li was gratified to note, though she maintained her bearing. It was as if she were going along purely as a favour.

Li let himself relax once they were gone. The lengths some people would go to to avoid conviction were amusing. No doubt he would have to try to find out from the Settlement Police who these two really were. Li had been the eldest of seven children and became man of the house when his father died in the 1911 revolution that overthrew Pu Yi. He hadn't been killed by loyalists or rebels, but crushed in a crowd cheering a visit by Sun Yat Sen. Li had quickly found that to maintain the family, discipline was needed, and this was something he had always found in everything he had done since.

The Doctor fell to the floor as he was shoved into a stone-walled cell opposite Romana's, but wasn't getting any sympathy from the policeman on guard who slammed the door, slid the locking bar across and left the cell area. Romana tapped her solid door experimentally. 'Locked with a wooden slide? Do they still use such primitive technology here?'

'Primitive but effective: no circuitry to disrupt, not even a metal bolt susceptible to a magnet. Even the sonic screwdriver won't get us out of this one...' He held up a dog whistle. 'This should, though.'

'K9? Will he be able to make it through the city? He will stand out a bit.'

'Of course he'll make it. He's the only dog in the country that won't have to run from any chefs.'

* * *

It had been a long night and Li had never actually got to bed, so he felt fuzzy from lack of sleep. He was beginning to wonder whether his family even recalled his name, so infrequently did they actually see each other these days. Still, he had some leave coming up soon, so he would make it up to his wife for being absent so often.

There was a note beside his little cup of joss sticks on his desk, informing him that the forensic team had finished with both the body and the knife. Fortune smiled on him, it would appear. Fetching a cup of tea from a battered office urn, Li grabbed his case notes and headed down to forensics in the basement.

Professor Ying was doing some paperwork, while his assistants

mopped around the wooden examination tables in the drab brick room. The aloof features that surrounded his moustache – neatly trimmed in European style – shifted into an acknowledging look as Li wandered in.

Li sometimes thought Ying had it easy; even the dead were all cleaned up in here and not lying amongst the rats as he usually found them, but admittedly some scientific expertise was occasionally useful. It was not what he'd call policework or crime-fighting, though. Even Yan Cheh's interference was more comprehensible to Li. 'You have something for me?'

Ying nodded gracefully. 'Your dead Englishman was killed by a single knife thrust to the heart from directly in front.' He checked his notes. 'The knife went in at a sixty-degree upward angle under the sternum.'

Li had already judged as much. 'What about the knife with the blood?'

'The only fingerprints on the knife are those of your prisoner. We also found his palmprint on the door and bonnet of the abandoned car at Nang Tao. There were bloodstains on the car which match both those on the knife and the blood of the body.'

Li nodded, satisfied. 'Then we can prepare an arraignment immediately.'

Ying smiled lopsidedly. 'There is a problem.'

'What?'

'The knife doesn't appear to be the murder weapon. The weapon used on the body had a blade approximately twice as wide as this one.'

'Couldn't it have been...?' Li made a see-saw motion by way of demonstration.

Ying shook his head. 'Wiggling it to enlarge the wound would show. I suppose it's theoretically possible that a second, larger, knife was used to disguise the state of the wound after death. I can't see why, though.'

'You're telling me I need to look for a second knife?'

'Or an accomplice.'

That woman Romana, Li thought; perhaps she was more deeply

involved than he had thought. 'I'll bear that in mind. I think I have another interrogation to conduct.'

Yeung had watched the new arrivals from his cell, wondering what they had done to get locked up in here. Westerners usually had their own laws.

* * *

The Doctor had stuck his arm out between the bars in his door and was aiming a loop of his scarf at the handgrip of the locking bar. Romana watched with obvious interest from her cell opposite. 'So that's what that's for...'

'Yes...Well, it is today, anyway.' With a flick of the wrist, he shot the woollen loop out, and it wrapped itself around the handgrip. 'Aha! I should be a rancher in the Old West.' He drew his hand back in through the bars and looped the scarf around the one furthest from the handgrip. Carefully, so as not to break the wool, he pulled back on it. The scarf dragged the locking bar along until it was free of the door. Grinning, he opened the door and stepped across to Romana's cell to open it. Yeung was astounded; this *gwai lo* was much better than the late Liu. A chorus of pleading cries started up from the other cells.

Romana stepped out of her cell like an empress emerging from a sedan chair. She looked grudgingly impressed. 'That was very practised.'

'You get locked up a lot in this sort of job.' The Doctor settled the scarf back on his shoulders. 'It's definitely time we weren't h-' A sudden harsh burst of crackling interrupted him.

Romana started visibly and pulled a wand from its hiding-place up her sleeve. 'It's picking up something - very close, too, by the sound of it.'

'What, just like that? If it is the fourth segment, then where has it been all this time?'

Romana pointed the tracer into various corners of the cell block before directing it down past the row of cells. It responded even more strongly. 'It seems to be coming from the end of the corridor.' Her eyes suddenly widened in surprise. 'Doctor, look!'

Yeung craned his neck to look as well and soon wished he hadn't. Yan Cheh's accursed skills were as nothing compared to this. A rippling pattern of light was coalescing across the stonework; imploding

ripples like a splash in reverse. The pattern soon shifted to a more bipedal shape, and before any of them realized what was happening, a man in loose black clothing had stepped out of the wall. The occupants of the other cells immediately fell silent with indrawn gasps.

Three more similarly clad men stepped out of the wall beside the leader as he looked around, then at the Doctor and Romana. They were all armed: the first with a curved broadsword, the others with a pair of butterfly knives, *nunchaku* and a vicious-looking hatchet.

The Doctor cleared his throat self-consciously and stepped forward. 'Ah, how do you do? I'm the Doctor, and this is –'

He ducked as the curved sword blade flashed past his head.

Romana backed towards the door to the main part of the police station and tried the handle. It was locked.

The assassin with the hatchet hurled it at her. She ducked and it whirled through the bars in the door and thudded into something in the main office. Cries of alarm rose from the office and there was the sound of running feet and jangling keys.

The Doctor hurled a wide loop of his scarf over the swordsman's head and tugged backwards, overbalancing him.

The knifeman immediately tripped over him. Three policemen burst into the corridor from the main office and waded in with a flurry of blows from their truncheons, but seemed as intent on defeating the Doctor as they were on defeating the assassins.

Romana slipped out into the office as the Doctor threw himself to the floor in an effort to avoid being sandwiched between the struggling combatants. She had scarcely vanished from Yeung's view, when a mechanical beast trundled into the corridor. Yeung pressed himself back against the wall of his cell. Human opponents were one thing, but this was surely demonic. 'K9,' the Doctor called, trying to keep the *nunchaku* safely tangled in his scarf, 'stun them!'

K9 responded immediately, with a rapid volley of red lightning blasts. The policemen and assassins all tumbled in a shapeless heap and the Doctor pulled himself from under the pile of bodies with difficulty. He dusted himself off. 'Your sense of timing leaves something to be desired.'

K9's tail drooped slightly. Romana shook her head as she returned. 'I don't think you're being fair on him, Doctor. Better late than never.'

'It's the possibility of being "late" that bothers me. Help me get them into these cells.' He started dragging an assassin into his own erstwhile cell, while Romana started depositing the policemen in hers. Although the Doctor had less difficulty moving his charges, Romana had one man fewer to deal with, and so they were finished at the same time. The Doctor knelt to examine the unconscious assassins with a frown. 'Romana, look at this.'

Romana locked the door of her cell and joined the Doctor in his assassin-filled one. 'What is it?'

Yeung could see that the Doctor had pulled a small silver locket from around one man's neck. 'This is odd; none of them have any identification, but they all have one of these lockets.'

Romana lifted the locket from the assassin nearest to her. It was a plain and uninscribed circular locket. She opened it.

'There's some sort of inlaid ceramic inside.'

The Doctor looked in the locket he had picked up. Set into it was a ceramic compass made up of seven turnable concentric rings with a compass needle in the centre. Each of the five outer rings was divided into sections, with each section containing a character of Chinese script. The sixth ring was divided up into areas containing combinations of dots, while the innermost ring was annotated with eight symbols from the *I Ching*. All of the hand-inked symbols were in the same shade of burnt red. 'Peculiar.'

'It looks like some sort of compass, or measuring device. For map-making?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'It's a geomantic compass, used for determining positions that have good or bad luck. I've never seen one with movable parts before, though.'

Romana traced a finger across the face of the geomantic compass she held. 'Presumably the compass point tells you where you are in relation to the planet's magnetic pole and also points to the symbols telling you good or bad fortunes.'

She gave the unconscious man a very disapproving look.

‘Something like that.’

‘It’s all superstitious nonsense, of course.’

‘Superstition can be useful. I once walked under a ladder and...’ He shook his head sorrowfully.

Yeung saw Romana was curious in spite of herself. He had to admit that leaving a tale unfinished like that was frustrating.

‘Well?’ Romana urged. ‘What happened?’

‘The signwriter whose ladder it was dropped his paint. It took three days to wash it all out.’

Romana sighed. ‘What do these inscriptions say?’

“When thunder wakes people a hundred leagues away, you shall lose neither ladle nor spoon.”

‘If you can’t read the ideograms, just say so.’

‘I can’t read the ideograms. The two outer rings are some kind of astrological data, the next one is geographical direction and the next two relate to landscape features. What do you think, K9?’

K9 scanned both locket with his extendible probe. ‘Blood is Type AB and bears the same genetic code as the hairs in the car I scanned at Nang Tao airfield.’

‘Blood?’ the two Time Lords echoed. The Doctor turned the locket around in his hand. ‘What blood?’

‘The ideograms are inscribed in blood, and have then been varnished over,’ K9 explained patiently. Yeung wasn’t surprised; the Tongs demanded palpable displays of loyalty.

‘Is this from the same person as the blood on that knife?’

‘Negative. Chemical and hormone balance suggests this sample is from humanoid female of approximately twenty-two years of age.’

‘Hmm. Hunting trophies, probably.’ The Doctor dropped the locket absently into a pocket.

Romana discarded the other with a distasteful look and searched her nearest assassin for anything he might have in his pockets, but the

plain black clothes didn't seem to have any pockets. There was, however, a mark showing from under the sleeve of his right arm. She pulled back the sleeve to reveal the sinister black and red tattoo of a scorpion, its stinger uncurled to strike. 'Have you seen anything like this before?'

The Doctor looked, his face hardening. He let out a long sigh. 'That explains a lot.'

'You know about it?'

'Yes. It's a Tong sign: the Black Scorpion, from the western mountains of Sichuan.' He led her out of the cell and locked the door. They went into the main office where the Doctor set about recovering the rest of their belongings from the cabinet in which they had been placed.

'They're a criminal organization?'

'They're *the* criminal organization, second only to the Lascars in the Si-Fan. When the Manchu dynasty usurped the empire from the old Ming dynasty in the seventeenth century, a lot of the old Hung secret societies re-formed to resist them.

Eventually they evolved into the Tongs and Triads. The Black Scorpion in particular are devotees of an ancient god called Weng-Chiang.'

'Three hundred years isn't very ancient.'

'No, well, obviously the Tong was formed from bands of Chinese dacoity that had been hanging around the mountains since before Qin Shi Huangdi unified the empire way back in the third century BC. Like the Thuggee in India, they committed acts of banditry on behalf of their god.'

'This Weng-Chiang?'

'Yes. He's an ethnic corruption of Sung-Chiang, the god of thieves and criminals. He had a thousand names and could take on any appearance he desired.'

'It doesn't sound like a good role model to me.'

'No... In his form as Weng-Chiang he could kill with light from his eyes and had absolutely lethal halitosis.' Finally settling his scarf into a comfortable position, he crossed the office to peer out of the main

doors of the station. 'The coast looks clear; let's get out of here.'

'Right.' Romana bolted for the door but was quickly held back by the Doctor.

'Not like that! You obviously haven't escaped from many jails. If people saw us running away, they'd think we're fugitives, as opposed to travellers strolling out after asking directions or reporting a missing dog.'

'Oh, I see. Sorry; but I didn't tend to get locked up until I met you.'

'Is that my fault?' Shaking his head, the Doctor strolled casually out the door.

* * *

Professor Ying shook his head as Li left; people just didn't use their heads enough, in his opinion. Knowledge was man's greatest weapon, he had always felt. He put down his cup and picked up the knife. He had a suspicion that had been nagging at him all along and wanted to test his theory in private. He held the knife pressed against the hot side of his tea urn. After a few seconds, the blade spread outwards in the blink of an eye.

Ying smiled to himself; it was exactly as he had expected.

He lifted the office telephone and dialled. 'Get me the Kuomintang barracks for the Fourteenth Engineers; the commandant's office.'

Yan Cheh was surprised to see the two westerners leave the police station so soon. He had discarded the leather coat and motorcycle goggles in favour of a loose suit and slouch hat since he had brought a car this time.

There was a strange machine with them – vaguely doglike, but all metal. Yan Cheh had never seen such a thing, though he supposed it was some American, or perhaps German, motorized contraption.

Together, they were all hurrying off through the street, dodging hawkers every foot of the way. Starting the car – an old Bugatti – Yan Cheh followed them at a mere walking pace. His slow speed was hardly unusual, given the number of people walking or just standing in the middle of the road.

Li's easy smile had returned as he took the stairs back up to ground

level. At least he could go on holiday having got a good result. His smile froze as he entered the empty office, noticing both the main door and the door to the cell area ajar.

He bolted across to the cell area and was reassured to see that all the doors were still locked. Less reassuring was the sight of the various weapons lying around the floor. Drawing his gun, he advanced into the corridor. Each cell had its inmate safely ensconced within, all looking strangely amused though they all remained silent.

He reached the Doctor's cell and was dumbfounded: it was full of unconscious Tong footsoldiers. Perhaps Du had gone over his head, he thought, and decided to deal with the strangers in his own way. If so, not only was it insulting but also a failure. He checked the men's wrists to be sure and was surprised to find that they wore Black Scorpion tattoos like the coolies from the opium den. A locket was lying on one of the recumbent bodies, and he examined it, seeing immediately that it was a geomancer's compass. Slamming the cell door in disgust, he crossed to Romana's cell, then slumped dejectedly against the door. He had the nasty suspicion that his head would roll if his superiors ever found out that his men were now locked in there.

Yan Cheh followed the strangers all the way back along Bubbling Well Road and round the corner to the Waibaidu bridge. To his surprise, the man was unlocking the door of a large blue booth, and all three entered.

Yan Cheh examined it from the other end of the bridge: it proclaimed itself to be a police telephone box of the kind they had in Britain. Perhaps the British had imported it for the Settlement Police. If so, then the fact that the man had a key to it suggested that they were something to do with the Settlement Police as well; investigating the local force, perhaps.

Perhaps they were also friends of the Fallen Angel and were following their shared mystery back to its source. Yan Cheh turned round in his seat, switching on a field radio that was built into the car's rear bulkhead and took up most of the boot. 'Rondo; it's me. Look out the recordings of Du's visits. I think we may find it useful to drop some hints to certain people.'

Six

Inside the TARDIS, the Doctor tossed his hat casually onto the hatstand. ‘Romana, there’s something very odd going on here.’

‘Someone must be tapping the powers of the fourth segment – the way that boat appeared... It seems a logical enough hypothesis. The last segment was being used to move between normal space and hyperspace.’

‘Yes, so you –’ The Doctor froze, open-mouthed.

‘Waitwaitwait... Wait a moment. Just what is it that the tracer traces? Hmm?’

‘The segments of the Key –’

‘Ah, but how does it recognize a segment, eh? What are the preprogrammed triggers that it reacts to, eh?’ He gave Romana a wide-eyed look of encouragement.

‘Any substance with a variable atomic weight; there can’t be too many of them around.’

‘And?’

‘And...the segments all have the powers of transmutation and transmigration.’

‘Think, Romana; we’re looking for the Key to Time, right? If it has any energies useful in the control or manipulation of time –’

Romana straightened abruptly. ‘The segments must be charged with chronon energy! You mean the tracer could be reacting to chronon radiation from another source?’

‘Exactly. If there was a large enough energy source intersecting a temporal shift in the vicinity it would give off more chronon radiation than any of the individual segments.’

His tone darkened. ‘The big question is: what energy source, and what temporal shift?’

‘Surely that can wait until we’ve completed our mission?’

‘I doubt that. So long as the source of chronon radiation is still operating, the tracer will just keep on reacting to it and bringing us back here. Unless, of course, you’re confident enough about your understanding of Guardian technology to reprogram the tracer to screen out the chronon radiation.’

Romana gave the tracer a wry look. ‘I wouldn’t think so.’

‘Neither would I.’ The Doctor rubbed at his chin. ‘On the other hand, what if we were to make a dedicated chronon detector? The tracer’s only picking them up as interference among a variety of signals, but a dedicated sensor wouldn’t have all that nonsense to worry about.’

‘K9’s sensors?’

Both Time Lords looked at the mechanical dog. The indicators on K9’s input panel flickered through a diagnostic cycle. ‘Master; paralleling my neutrino converter with a tachyon resonance filter will perform the required function.’

The Doctor and Romana knelt beside him. ‘Brilliant!’ the Doctor shouted, making Romana wince. ‘Any difference in background neutrino levels or velocities will be the result of interference from the chronon discharges. The filter will analyse any of those resonance anomalies and give us a read-out on chronon strength and location.’

Romana brushed a strand of dark hair away from her eyes.

‘I suppose you want me to say that’s terribly clever.’

‘Well, I’ll take any complimen–’

K9’s tail wagged slightly. ‘Congratulations are unnecessary, mistress.’

The Doctor’s face fell.

* * *

Hsien-Ko emerged into the wide hall of her house from the nursery. Like so many European mansions, the hall contained a wide staircase rising from a chessboard-patterned floor. A few statuettes of local deities and dragon kings were dotted around on low pedestals.

Kwok had been waiting patiently outside. The right side of his face was pink and scarred, but he now wore a patch over his burnt eye to hold on a white disinfectant pad. Even with only one eye and a

morphine-blurred mind, he could see that something affected her when she was in there. She didn't look hurt as such, but perhaps slightly lost. She composed herself quickly, and beckoned Kwok. 'I'm concerned about the effect that losing the opium den's altar will have on the Tong. Most of them honestly believe that their faith will bring back Weng-Chiang.'

'Their belief can't hurt our plans.'

'No, but it may blinker them to other events around them that could. Religion seems to do that. You'd better go back and recover the altar; we might need it for the troops' morale later.'

Kwok nodded impassively. The beliefs of the Tong's footsoldiers didn't mean anything to him, but morale was something he could understand. 'Consider it done. There is one other thing...'

'It won't be much longer until you can retire.'

'I've been thinking that for years.'

'This time it's true. We already have the moderator in place in the core cavern.'

'Then we'll need more power conduits.'

'I'll find a suitable target.'

His subordinates had delivered their reports on the interrogations of the prisoners from the opium den, but Inspector Li didn't think much of the answers. Everybody seemed to have developed acute amnesia that even the occasional pistol-whipping couldn't cure.

Forensics had turned up nothing at the shrine in the back room, and its presence was just about the only thing he had which provided a clue. If he knew which god it was dedicated to, he might be able to work out which group were followers.

Unfortunately, there was no sign of sacrifices or offerings that Ying had been able to identify. Most gods didn't require blood, of course, but Li had thought it would have been conveniently memorable if this one did.

The shrine had been built into the wall, he recalled. Perhaps there was something hidden behind it. It couldn't hurt to look, he decided, and he didn't have much else to go on. He called out to a uniformed

officer who was passing his desk. 'You!'

'Yes, sir?'

'Get down to Ying, and tell him to prepare for a little expedition.'

* * *

The Doctor knelt beside K9, his head and hands buried inside the robot's glittering innards. Romana was examining the tracer for any signs of damage it might have received lately.

The sonic screwdriver buzzed, and there was a flash and a bang from inside K9's casing. The Doctor hurriedly straightened, blinking rapidly, and peered at a charred circuit in one hand. 'Hmm. I wonder what that was for.' He tossed the circuit over his shoulder. 'All right, K9, what about now?'

K9's antennae wiggled with a whirr. '11101001010001 -'

'Stop!' The Doctor picked the discarded circuit up off the floor and blew some dust off it. 'So that's what it's for.' He hastily repaired the damage and squeezed the circuit back into place. Right. How about that?'

'Translator unit functioning normally.'

'Yes, yes, I can hear that, but what about the resonance filter?'

'Modifications are adequate. I am detecting latent chronon decay in several locations.'

'Several?' Romana asked.

'Affirmative, mistress. Correlation of available data suggests a network of locations recently exposed to chronon radiation extending beyond sensor range.'

The Doctor sealed up K9's inspection hatch and wiped his hands on the end of his scarf. 'I don't like the sound of that. We have to find out what's causing it.'

Romana frowned. 'Do we?'

'The tracer takes a bearing on each segment from the previous one's location; that means if we risk making a blind flight from Earth we might never get a reading on the next segment.'

‘Assuming this isn’t caused by the fourth segment.’

‘Exactly. And if it isn’t, then we have to put a stop to it to end its interference with the tracer. Besides, if I didn’t find out what was going on, I wouldn’t sleep at night for wondering.’

‘You know that the locals say that curiosity killed the cat.’

‘Satisfaction brought it back.’

‘So you hope.’

The Doctor recovered his hat from the hatstand. ‘K9, can you lead us to the nearest concentration of chronon decay?’

‘Affirmative, master. It is not far.’

‘Good. Time for walkies.’

* * *

Kwok had allowed the coolies he had brought with him to burn a few stolen banknotes on the altar as an offering to Weng-Chiang. He knew better, of course. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe in the gods as such, but he knew the Tong’s history a little better than they did.

Happy men worked harder, however, so he didn’t bother to enlighten them. The dragon statuette, octagonal-framed mirror and joss-stick holders were carefully packed away in wooden boxes, while Kwok heaved at the altar’s bolts with a crowbar to part it from the wall. Two crates were already open and waiting for it to be disassembled. One bolt popped free and Kwok straightened to recover his breath. ‘Take the boxes down to the truck, then come and help me with the other bolts.’

They bowed quickly and removed the laden boxes. They returned a few minutes later to join Kwok in attacking the remaining wall fixtures. The altar finally came away and was quickly separated into its component parts for packing. There were only bare bricks behind it. They were placed into the crates and Kwok carefully nailed the lids shut. ‘All right, that’s it. Let’s go.’

He led the coolies, two of whom carried each crate, down the narrow stairs to the alley, their truck waiting at the far end.

It had gone smoothly, so Kwok was glad. Excitement was all very well,

but everyday work had its moments.

Both the crates and the truck bore the logo of Tsingtao Breweries, so nobody should take any notice of their presence beside a bar. While the coolies boarded the back of the truck with the crates, Kwok went up to the cab. Doubtless he would find a new safe house in the International Settlement in the morning.

Opening the passenger door, he looked back to check on the progress of the loading, and was glad to see that it was all done. He was astounded, however, to see the strangers from the docks walking along towards the truck. They now had some sort of mechanical dog with them, which most of the pedestrians were giving a wide berth.

Kwok's ruined eye ached under its patch despite the morphine he'd taken for the wound, and he felt it was aching for revenge. The westerner's curious expression suddenly changed and Kwok knew he'd been recognized. He leapt into the cab. 'Get us out of here, now!'

The Doctor's eyes widened. 'That was one of the men from the docks! The one who killed those arms dealers. He must be one of the people responsible for the chronon sources.'

'He's also getting away again,' Romana pointed out, sounding unimpressed at the Doctor's observational skills.

'Not necessarily.' The Doctor scooped up K9 and tossed him into the back seat of the nearest car.

The driver, a portly Briton in a tweed suit scarcely suited to the local climate, jumped out. 'What do you think you're doing, man?'

'I'm a Doctor, and this is an emergency.' The Doctor pressed a handful of money into the man's hand while Romana shook her head and got in. How much of the currency was actually from Earth, let alone legal tender in 1937 Shanghai was open to question, but the Doctor didn't stop to check. 'Consider that a rental fee!'

He started the car and floored the accelerator.

* * *

The portly Briton was still standing in shock on the pavement when Li's car drew up beside him. The Doctor was a very distinctive figure and Li had recognized him immediately as he approached the bar.

The opium den would have to wait; answers from the Doctor and Romana would be much more practical. Besides, Ying's forensics team would be along in a minute. Ignoring the gesticulating Briton, Li started his police siren and tore after the Doctor.

The gods must have decided to give him a second chance.

* * *

Kwok ignored the panicking road users ahead and concentrated on searching for any pursuers. Sure enough, a car was following, and it looked like the dockside strangers were inside. Worse still, a police siren had started up behind them.

Frustrated, Kwok punched the glove compartment door to let off steam. 'Lose them,' he urged the driver.

The driver nodded and made a sharp right turn. The truck raced across one of the western bridges over Suzhou Creek and the driver hastily turned left. Kwok approved: if they could get through Guyi Gardens and into open countryside, they could lose their pursuit more easily by hiding in some secluded spot.

* * *

Li had followed the Doctor's car for several miles before becoming aware, once they had left Guyi Gardens behind, that he in turn was pursuing a truck.

Li considered this. Was the Doctor pursuing, or merely following? Or was he even running interference for the truck, in the belief that Li was chasing it? It was a brewer's truck and the opium den had been hidden in a bar...

He smiled to himself. Suddenly it seemed that clues were coming thick and fast. He might not have to delay that leave and abandon the tending of his wife after all. He felt happier than he had for several days, now that the suspects were almost in his grasp again.

* * *

Kwok looked back gloomily as they bumped through the dusty farm tracks. 'It's no good. We'll have to take the Dragon Path, and risk being seen.' His pursuers wouldn't understand it anyway, even if they did see.

He took the locket from around his neck and attached a thin wire from it to the truck's electrical system. The difficult bit would be judging the truck's speed and deciding how long a path to open to accommodate it.

He opened the locket to expose the face of the geomantic compass inside and tried to clear his mind of distractions such as the bumps in the road. Mumbling the calculations to himself, he started twisting the ceramic rings around the compass.

* * *

The three vehicles had now closed distance and Li was beginning to think it might be worth risking a shot at the truck's tyres. That would force the truck to stop; with any luck the Doctor would either stop or run into the back of it.

He drew his Browning and moved his arm out of the window to take aim at the truck's tyres. Any second now and he would have a clear shot...

The air rippled and the truck was suddenly gone. Li gasped in astonishment, trying to blink away what he was sure was a trick of the light. By the time the blink ended, the Doctor's car had also vanished and concentric ripples like a circular heat haze were condensing towards him.

He stood on the brakes instinctively, too stunned to think of a more rational approach to whatever was happening. It was too late, and he hurtled into the ripples.

The land and the sky twisted, swirling into one another.

Seven

The study was a small room lined with *objets d'art*, the walls hung with delicate prints and misty watercolours.

Hsien-Ko sat in a cane chair, the *dim sum* spread across the neighbouring table hardly touched. Instead she was flicking furiously through a worn leather-bound notebook, the pages of which were crammed with tiny writing. The notes were in a variety of languages, though all in the same hand.

She had always had a good memory and was sure she'd seen something in the book years ago that now reminded her of the man she had seen earlier tonight. Or, more accurately, he reminded her of the note. She found it quickly. ' *"January twenty-fourth,"* ' she murmured to herself. ' *"A tall man with wide pale eyes and hair that curls like the ram... The police are either unwilling or unable to name him and insist on simply calling him The Doctor..."* Interesting.'

She sat back with a sigh and looked towards the framed print that hung on the wall. 'What would you have done in this situation, Father?' Despite her good memory, she didn't recall her father quite well enough to judge how he thought. That was something she could only deduce from his letters and journals.

So much wisdom depended on one's ancestors that sometimes she felt incomplete with that lack of knowledge.

'No orders to obey blindly; ours to reason why...' Sometimes she envied Kwok. Her troops did what they did because she was their leader; Kwok did his duty because it pleased her and that pleased him. As for herself...She wondered often why she did what she did, supposing it must just be who she was. Or perhaps what she was.

'What I owe,' she said aloud. Whatever happens, she had to repay her debts, especially that to Weng-Chiang. Abruptly she wondered when the last time was that she had done anything not connected with that debt.

With the exception of nights with Kwok – who was her most valued officer anyway – she couldn't think of any. That couldn't be healthy; was she so obsessed that she had no time for life?

She shook her head; there was plenty of time for life later.

After her debt was repaid.

* * *

Things had quietened down at the docks since the prisoners had been taken away. The trucks were still on the wharf, guarded until Ying and his forensics teams had had the chance to examine them.

They were not the only ones: Yan Cheh was still curious as to exactly what was being traded here. Obviously it had been guns of some kind, but perhaps closer examination would reveal what was so special about them. He didn't want the police to get the wrong idea about his presence, however, and remained in the shadows as much as possible.

So far, however, he hadn't seen any sign of the guards. He wished he could be surprised at this fact, but had half-expected it. A faint sea-mist had drifted upriver and gently veiled the docks, but he found this an advantage in moving unseen.

Others evidently had the same idea, as wraith-like forms darted through the mist like figures of smoke. They probably saw him, he had guessed, but assumed his equally vague form to be one of their own men.

He slipped from a loading area to the open doors of the disused warehouse. The interior was slightly cooler than the wharf outside and he couldn't help but feel a faint chill. He moved carefully, checking left and right as he entered. As he feared, a group of low mounds lay hidden just inside the door.

They looked almost like piles of old oilskins, except that oilskins didn't have hands or lolling heads poking out here and there.

Yan Cheh's heart sank; these men could easily have been drugged or bribed. Killing these innocents just to steal the trucks was a typical example of human nature. Sometimes – often – he was ashamed to be a part of the same species. The cab doors slammed, not loudly, but seeming so in the uncanny quiet of the morning. If he was going to examine the trucks, he would have to hurry.

He flitted through the mist quickly, ducking below the tailgate of the rearmost of the three trucks. All he had to do was look over and hope there were no guards inside...

Faint footsteps, as measured as the ticking of a metronome, echoed from the wood and brick fronts of the dockside buildings. Perhaps one

of the policemen was still alive; if so, Yan Cheh certainly didn't want to be found, lest he become the prime suspect for the deaths of the others.

His success depended on knowledge, however, and unlike Orson Welles' cloaked vigilante on the American forces' radio, mind-reading was not an option open to Yan Cheh. The footsteps were coming from around the front of the column of trucks, so he slid himself underneath the nearest vehicle.

Twisting his neck round, he looked out between the wheels.

The sea-mist still wreathed the docks, but something was definitely moving out there on the wharf. It solidified into a darker wraith in the mist; a tiny figure moved steadily past the side of the truck. Even from underneath the vehicle, Yan Cheh could make out the ends of its arms, so it couldn't be very tall.

Perhaps a child, he thought. That being the case, then the chances were that the woman in the white overcoat was around here somewhere.

The figure stopped at the back of the truck and turned from side to side very slowly, as if listening for something. Yan Cheh wondered just how silent he had been here. 'Is the coast clear?' someone shouted from the front of the convoy. There was no audible answer, but the figure moved back round the corner of the truck and paused there, so Yan Cheh presumed it was either nodding or shaking its head. 'Good,' the voice replied. 'Come on, we're going home.'

The figure headed back up the wharf and Yan Cheh decided he must have been silent enough after all. If they were heading home, however, then here was a chance to find their lair. Following Kwok and the woman hadn't worked, but if he could stow away on this truck...

He slipped out from under it, pulling himself up the tailgate just far enough to see whether anyone was inside. The truck was filled with crates, but there were no guards there.

Presumably each truck's guard was in the cab with the driver, where it wasn't so damp.

The truck engines were all spluttering into life, including this one's. Yan Cheh swung himself up into the back of the truck, and settled down amidst a nest of crates. The truck shuddered into life, and he

smiled to himself; this time, he couldn't help but find the Tong's headquarters.

* * *

The Doctor slammed on the brakes as the twisted mass of land and sky snapped back into the cluttered grey streets of the city.

A rickshaw sprang out from a sidestreet barely a second later, and the car halted within inches of it. Further on, under the light of innumerable coloured paper lanterns, a mass of people were swarming around in the wake of the departing Tsingtao Brewery truck.

Romana and the Doctor exchanged a look. "Transmigration of object?" she wondered aloud.

'It certainly felt like it. K9, what sort of chronon radiation are you picking up now?'

'Massive chronon activity in our current location; decaying rapidly.'

'Yes, well, there's the eating for you.'

'What?'

'The proof of the pudding. Someone's using chronon energy to open interstitial pathways, and I don't like the chances that that takes.'

Romana shook her head, her dark locks flowing around her classical features. 'That's not possible, at least not as far as I know.'

'Just because something is not possible does not mean it can't be done – especially by someone who doesn't know any better. Sooner or later you'll learn how flexible reality can be. I wonder how they're doing it.'

'With the fourth segment, obviously.'

'Maybe... K9, did what just happened to us have any similarity to the effect of Vivien Fay's staff?'

'Negative, master.'

'I thought not. I suppose we had better return this car if I can find my way back to where we found it.'

'And then? Why don't we try making short hops in the TARDIS –

spatial only. Then perhaps we can triangulate a source for this.'

The Doctor thought about that, then shook his head. 'No, I have a better idea; we'll make a few short spatial hops in the TARDIS and try to triangulate the source of this.'

Romana gave him a bland look. 'I refuse to let you bait me like that,' she muttered under her breath.

* * *

Li sat, trying to understand what had happened. Somehow he was back in the city, even though he'd been several miles outside it when he stood on the brakes. He had never experienced anything quite like it and wondered if it had really happened at all. Perhaps he had been drugged and hallucinated it?

The last time he felt so unsure of the world was when the Japanese had briefly occupied the city in 1932. Then, he had been shunted from interrogation to interrogation with increasingly little idea of what they wanted from him.

He had survived that, though, as he had survived everything else life had thrown at him. The trick seemed to be to adapt to new rules, rather than to deny them. Only an unstable personality would try to deny something which had clearly happened.

A car up ahead was doing a three-point turn and then started coming back towards him. At least the pedestrians could see it coming this time. Li glanced at it numbly and saw the Doctor and his accomplice inside.

'All right,' he mumbled to himself. 'Reality is whatever doesn't go away when you stop believing in it, so whatever happened was real.' His ancestors had coped with such sorcery, so he could too. The Doctor might have some knowledge about what had happened, so his capture was even more vital to Li. Starting the car with shaking hands, Li made his own three-point turn and tried to catch sight of the Doctor's car again.

* * *

Yan Cheh had opened a couple of the crates that shared the back of the truck with him, and found that they contained more examples of the new gun. Unlike any other submachine gun he had seen, it had no wood anywhere in its construction and had a folding metal stock. He

didn't know how its performance would compare, but it certainly seemed lighter and more easily portable than most.

Another crate contained weapons like flare pistols but with grenade-firing attachments. This was new to Yan Cheh. He had heard of rifle grenades, but never ones launched by pistol.

He felt a faint swing to the side and realized the trucks were turning and slowing. There was now a sound of crunching gravel which suggested a driveway. It seemed logical to assume that they had reached their destination.

Yan Cheh dropped to the ground as the column of trucks turned from a driveway into a gravel parking area. He rolled with the fall and sprinted into the landscaped garden's nearest clump of bushes as the trucks drew to a halt.

The parking area was in front of a large three-storey French-style mansion. The front of the house was graced with a wide patio from which two staircases descended to the gravel. A narrower stretch of gravel led round the side of the house to a courtyard beyond a decorated archway. Floodlights kindly illuminated the gravel parking area as fatigue-clad men swarmed out of the house and started hauling crates out of the backs of the trucks. Other men rolled trolleys out from the courtyard entrance, ready to receive the crates.

Using the crunching of gravel to mask his own footsteps through the bushes, Yan Cheh tried to circle round towards the front of the trucks.

The men suddenly stopped work, however, and looked towards the main entrance to the house. Yan Cheh gently eased an eggplant branch aside to see what had attracted their attention. The culprit was the same as that at the docks: a very beautiful woman with lustrous long hair tied back in a ponytail and green eyes glinting from her delicate porcelain features.

She now wore Kuomintang fatigues, as did the other men around her.

Still, her presence here proved his own intuition had been correct. The girl was familiar, now that he saw her more clearly. She had unusual jade eyes under delicate brows and her long hair was swept round from a centre parting and tied at the back to drape over her left shoulder. Hsien-Ko was her name, he recalled suddenly; he had seen her on the dance floor at the fashionable Club Do-San with her beau once or twice.

She gestured towards someone out of sight on the other side of the trucks. 'See him back to the nursery,' she told the nearest man. She moved round to inspect the contents of the first truck. Yan Cheh was surprised at the men's deference to her; it was most unusual, and not just for a Tong member.

The diversion would be useful if it allowed him to explore the house. He burrowed deeper into the undergrowth, circling round the verdant border of the driveway. There was no real blind-spot at which to cross to the house, but if he chose his moment right, he should be able to dash over while the Tong members were all facing away from the main door.

He watched them closely, and picked his moment to sprint across the turn in the drive. A pair of headlights speared him immediately and he turned in surprise. A Tsingtao Brewery truck was entering the drive and swinging towards him. Yan Cheh could see that Kwok was in the passenger seat, wearing a very surprised expression. He now had a field dressing over his right eye, held on with a patch, and the skin on the cheek below still showed some signs of blood.

Yan Cheh hurled himself out of the way and the truck screeched to a halt. The driver sounded his horn to attract attention to the discovery of the intruder, even as Yan Cheh plunged headlong back into the trees. He knew he wouldn't be able to sneak in now, as the guards would be more vigilant for the rest of the night. Instead, he made his way back round towards the perimeter wall of the grounds.

Armed men were already crashing through the bushes ahead of him as well as behind. They weren't being very stealthy, but were undoubtedly trying to flush him out. He turned right, heading away from the house, carefully listening to the sounds closing in from either side. There was one guard just a few yards away and Yan Cheh reached back over his shoulder for the hilt of his *katana*. He froze as a twig snapped quite near on the other side, then drew a Colt instead.

Guessing at the positions of the guards nearest to him and judging his moment carefully, Yan Cheh fired one shot in the air an instant before hurling himself to the ground. Answering volleys immediately erupted from either side, accompanied by yells of pain.

Allowing himself a smile of relief, Yan Cheh slipped quietly through the shrubbery towards the perimeter wall while the guards got on with shooting at each other. The house could wait; right now he was happy to get out in one piece.

Hsien-Ko cursed the inexperience of her servants. 'Cease fire! You're shooting at each other!' The men could rob the innocent easily enough, but outwitting an experienced warrior seemed beyond their capabilities. She reminded herself to be calm; her green eyes were supposed to be a sign of harmony, after all.

Kwok ran up to her, gun in hand. At least he was safe. 'It was Yan Cheh.'

'I gathered that.' She sighed. 'If we knew who he was, I could send –'

'Would he have any more luck?'

'What could Yan Cheh do against him? Shoot him?' She shook her head. There was no point in indulging in such speculation. 'Did you get the relics from the safe house?'

'Yes.' He followed as she led the way towards the house. There were others there – a policeman and the strangers who interfered at the docks.'

That hadn't entirely surprised her; not after what she'd read. 'The Doctor, and the girl must be Leela.'

Kwok's eyebrow tilted. 'You know them?'

'I have my sources, Ah-Kwok. Just as Yan Cheh does. Did they follow you?'

'I had to enter the Dragon Path while they were watching.'

Hsien-Ko nodded. That was unfortunate, but something of the sort was bound to happen eventually. 'It's all right. So long as you lost them, there's no harm done.'

* * *

Li scanned the street vigilantly, watching for the car with the Doctor and Romana. He knew they had come this way, but he had lost them all too quickly. He kicked himself mentally as he realized that he was being foolish. He knew where they would probably be going – back to the bar. With that in mind, he could find his own route.

Dodging through the banner-hung streets without any care for the pedestrians and rickshaws that filled them, he drew up opposite the bar just as the Doctor's car halted on the other side of the road. Li

drew his Browning and sprang from the car. ‘Police; you’re under –’

The Doctor, who had just opened his door, closed it and raced off. Li fired a couple of shots at the back of the car, but this didn’t persuade the fugitive to stop. Tossing his gun onto the passenger seat, Li started up his own car.

This was getting personal, he felt. The Doctor was easily within sight and Li made several blasts on the horn to clear the road ahead. He was determined not to let the Doctor out of his sight again.

People scattered as the cars hurtled down the street and Li was glad to see them show some sense for a change. There was something else on the edge of his consciousness, though; a distressful wailing...

The Doctor had adapted remarkably quickly to their new problem and had so far managed to avoid running anybody down. ‘Do you know, I don’t think they like us here? I mean, it’s not as if we’re in *Shanghai Surprise*...’

‘What’s that noise?’

‘What noi– Air-raid siren. The Japanese in Manchuria occasionally bomb the city just to prove that they can.’

K9 whirred slightly. ‘Danger, master, danger. Two aircraft approaching from north-north-west.’

‘I hate to say I told you so, but...’

Romana pointed upwards urgently. ‘Doctor, look out!’

The Doctor yanked the wheel hard to the left as a Japanese Mitsubishi Ki-15 single-engined plane hurtled along the rooftops like a winged demon, the muzzle of its wingtip-mounted machine gun flashing like a winking eye of fire.

The roar of its engine drowned out everything else as the sparks of exploding lamps sent people scattering across the street. Brick chippings and slivers of wood tore through the air as ferociously as the bullets themselves, burrowing as easily through the street traders’ melons and sides of ham as through the people around them.

The roof of the car exploded into fragments as ricochets and splinters tore the windows to shreds. By some miracle neither the Doctor nor Romana were hurt, and K9 didn’t even notice the small dents that

were knocked in his casing.

Someone in the KMT had set up light machine guns on some sheltered roofs, however, and these returned fire against the oncoming second aircraft in line. The first had already passed them and several bombs hurtled down from it, leaping along the street like rutting salmon.

Li was still some distance behind the Doctor's car and he twisted the wheel to get out of the street. Unfortunately, an ox-cart was blocking the road to the right, and Li's car slammed into it. Sacks of rice were hurled from the cart as a series of explosions ripped apart the buildings a few hundred yards on.

Wood and stone billowed outwards like smoke amidst the flame of the blasts. The narrow streets channelled the flying debris like buckshot along the barrel of a shotgun, and a storm of pebbles blew Li's windscreen in. He ducked in time to avoid being blinded by the splinters, but still got a painful set of cuts to his face.

Another aircraft roared overhead, the vibrations rattling his teeth in his head as it approached, but this was the one the KMT were shooting at. He hoped they got it – and not just because the bombers were abetting the escape of a suspect.

Sparks flew from the car doors as they scraped along the walls of the narrow sidestreet, the Doctor driving like a maniac. The second Japanese aircraft was circling around for a better attack run when a trail of fire suddenly erupted from its engine. The port wingtip parted company with the rest of the wing and the Ki-15 tumbled towards the junction which they themselves were approaching.

Stopping or trying to turn away so close to the impact site would be fatal, K9 calculated, but if they could get through the crash area his trajectory calculations had projected and out the other side, they might have a chance. The Doctor floored the accelerator, sending the car through a series of washing lines.

The Doctor struggled to pull off a nightshirt that had wrapped itself around his head while trying to maintain a straight line. He finally hurled it away, while Romana looked round to see how close the plane was. 'We're not going to get out from under it in time.'

'If we stop or try to turn it'll catch up for sure!'

Smoke began to stream from under the bonnet as the sound of the plane's engines rose deafeningly. Looking far larger than life, the

bomber loomed in the empty rear windscreen and clipped a rooftop only a few tens of yards away.

The upper storey of the building crumpled and spread out like a slow-motion film of a cake being squashed. Timber from its perimeter balcony hurtled towards them as the burning plane slewed aside and continued downwards. In an instant, the Ki-15's remaining bombload detonated.

The building swelled up and flew apart, bearing chunks of burning fuselage like driftwood in the surf. The car shook, either hitting or being hit by something, and was quickly enveloped in a roaring cloud of dust and smoke that was blacker than the darkest night.

Rondo, the huge bouncer from the Club Do-San, picked himself up from the debris-strewn cobblestones. Shopping for the herbs and spices the club's catering staff required wasn't usually dangerous for someone of his stature, but this was hardly a usual evening.

Flames were guttering among the charred stones at the far end of the street a couple of hundred yards away, and wailing Chinese were either staggering away from or running towards them. Rondo wished he could do something to help, but there were too many people to know where to start.

Just before the crash, Rondo could have sworn he saw a car pass him, with two people in it, that rang a bell somehow. He returned to the car he had brought, ashamed to see that it had received a number of minor dents and scratches. He should have prevented that, especially in such a fine new Bugatti.

There was a walnut panel set behind the two seats and Rondo withdrew a radio microphone from it.

He had news to report.

Li had an uncomfortable sensation of *déjà vu*. It was 1932 all over again, with Japanese aircraft having destroyed parts of his city. At least this was only a nuisance raid and there would be no occupation force.

Not yet, anyway, though he had no doubt that Shanghai would fall again one day. Ryuji Matsu, who had interrogated him in 1932, had promised that. He believed Matsu, having been impressed as well as horrified by the Japanese efficiency.

At least they understood the need for order and reason, even though they were an enemy nation. People were alike all over, or so it seemed. Li felt cheated as well as that feeling of *déjà vu*. He needed answers from the Doctor, and a corpse couldn't provide them. He loped around the scattered pools of fire among the wreckage, leaving them to be dealt with by the civilians with their bucket chains. Everyone made way for him, his slight advantage in height intimidating them as much as the scowl above his pointed chin.

The Doctor's car had somehow just about made it clear of the wreckage, but not quite. Its bonnet and roof showed clearly against the greys and browns of the ruined brick and plaster, but it was mostly buried. The Doctor lay under a smouldering beam just beyond it. He must have been thrown through the windscreen as the car came to grief.

Li felt for a pulse at the Doctor's throat. His skin was very cool, but there was a faint pulse to be found. It had a curious sort of echo to it, but Li was no medical expert, and couldn't say that it wasn't caused by a burst blood vessel somewhere.

What mattered was that the Doctor was alive.

Li grinned as he slipped a handcuff around the Doctor's wrist, the other cuff going around his own wrist. Then he allowed himself to relax. Now that he had his prisoner, he could look on the events with a little equanimity; the Doctor had given him a good run for his money. He wasn't so happy about the prospect of carrying him back to the station, but he didn't have much of a choice.

Lifting the Doctor over his shoulder in a fireman's lift, Li started to retrace his steps over the precarious wreckage.

* * *

Yan Cheh had no trouble finding Rondo amidst the scurrying rescuers. 'The strangers?'

Rondo pointed across the rubble to where they could see someone carrying the man with the scarf. Yan Cheh doubted he could catch up with them over the ruined terrain. 'All right, what about the girl?' Rondo merely shrugged, but his eyes misted over slightly.

Yan Cheh hurried over to the squashed car. He certainly couldn't risk leaving someone buried alive. A huge slab had fallen forward across the shattered windscreen, but the passenger door had buckled

outward with the pressure on the roof. Yan Cheh grabbed the edge and pulled, not caring how unstable the brick rubble around it might be.

The door screeched open a little more, but not far enough.

Rondo gently moved Yan Cheh aside and heaved at the warped metal. With an ear-splitting squeal, it popped free and the girl from the docks toppled out.

Yan Cheh caught her and felt her wrist for a pulse. There was certainly some movement there. Blood had streamed down her face from a cut high on her forehead, but Yan Cheh could see that she was quite striking: tall even by western standards, with exquisitely sculpted features under cascading dark hair.

He looked back at Rondo. 'Bring the car round.'

Eight

The moon was swollen and icy over Kanamaruhara airfield, but at least it afforded cadet pilot Wakabayashi sufficient light to check his watch. He still had another three hours of boring sentry duty before he was due to be relieved.

Out on the dispersal fields beyond the shrub-encrusted embankments, the planes he so desired to fly were lined up in silence. Those *akatonbos*, such a vibrant sunny yellow by day, were now a ghostly ashen under the moon. He wondered how long it would be before he got the chance to fly one of them; so far he hadn't even been granted a 'flight' on the glider cockpit that ran along thick wires across the parade ground.

The night sounds – crickets chirping, the flags fluttering in the breeze and the distant rumble of trains – were relaxing; he preferred them to the bustle of the day. A faint metallic squeaking made him straighten up: something was moving on badly oiled wheels.

He returned to the wide road that ran past the repair workshops to the armoury and magazine. The sound seemed to be coming from there. Unshouldering his rifle, he moved onwards a little more slowly and carefully. As he neared the compound where some construction equipment was stored along with various tractor-driven electrical generators, the eerie squeaking slowed. After a few heartbeats, a pram with skeletal wheels rolled out from an alley down the side of the building.

Wakabayashi puzzled over the pram for a moment: the nearest town was Utsonomiya, some thirty-seven miles away; there were no married quarters on this base, so where had it come from? Footsteps followed the pram as he reached it and a woman in a thickly quilted kimono walked slowly out of the alley, keeping her head respectfully lowered.

Wakabayashi decided it must be the mistress of one of the officers; perhaps he had set her up with a small apartment in one of the disused storerooms. It wasn't strictly allowed, but nor was it unusual. He slung his rifle onto his shoulder and held out his hand to her. 'I'll show you where you want to go.'

Perhaps there might be a reward for such kindness when his watch was over...

‘That’s very kind of you.’

He knew that women liked to be complimented on their offspring – or so it seemed to him – and leaned in towards the pram with a nervous smile. His hand touched something wet on the edge of the pram and he grimaced, thinking it was just his luck. His hand, however, was red when he looked at it and he noticed a tiny scarlet handprint on the side of the pram. It was as if something had left it there while hauling itself over the side.

Wakabayashi peered in more closely; perhaps something had happened to the child, such as being beaten by its mother’s lover. The small bundle in the pram shifted and Wakabayashi reached out to it.

There was a silver flash that didn’t even leave him time to scream.

Hsien-Ko caught the sentry’s body as it fell so that his rifle wouldn’t clatter on the ground, and dragged it back into the passageway between buildings. She felt sorry for his family, but war was war, and at least his death was quick. That was more than her people could expect from them.

She dug out the keys she had taken from the duty officer a few minutes earlier – he wouldn’t ever need them again – and unlocked the heavy padlocks on the compound’s gate. Once the gate was opened, she went back to the pram and gave it a gentle push. The air beyond it rippled and the pram vanished into the distortion.

She paused a few moments. ‘The bank is open,’ she said quietly. ‘Come in for the withdrawal.’

Almost immediately, Kwok stepped from the air, his athletic frame carrying him with catlike grace. He looked around suspiciously as nine other men followed.

‘You know what we came for,’ said Hsien-Ko. ‘Form a chain and load directly onto the trucks at Utsonomiya, then we’ll drive the lot back through the main Dragon Path.’

‘And the mobile generators?’ Kwok asked.

‘They should be able to drive directly through.’

‘Right.’ Kwok quickly organized the men, who paired off to carry crates into their individual splashes of distorted air. It looked like it was going well, Hsien-Ko noted. If so, they would repeat this strategy

later. Right now, she had to return to Shanghai to prepare to receive these goods. Besides, she didn't really feel comfortable in Japan.

Giving the operation a last look, Hsien-Ko stepped into nothingness.

The first light of dawn crept across crisp smooth sheets, rose over soft pillows and banished the shadows from around Romana's eyes. With a groan, she sat up, gently exploring the dressed cut on her forehead. She closed her eyes again momentarily, then opened them wide. She wasn't lying in the ruined car. Instead, she was in a wide bed in a plush room with a desk, armchairs, a thick carpet and a mahogany dresser.

A Chinese girl in a uniform-like dress was just straightening the curtains she had opened, and bowed slightly to Romana as she left the room. She looked as if she were trying to repress an embarrassed giggle. Romana couldn't think why; humans were so unfathomable.

She went slightly woozily to the dresser and examined the dressing on her forehead. It looked more like a military field dressing than anything else. A simple but elegant cheongsam, a gleaming silver dragon curling around its rich purple background silk, was neatly draped over one chair in front of the dressing-table. Pressing it against herself in the front of the mirror, Romana confirmed that it was exactly her size.

The arched windows through which the light had entered attracted her attention once she had donned the cheongsam.

They opened onto a high view of the hazy waters of the Huangpu, the faint misty haze tinted gold by the sun. Sampans commuted between moored ships and overloaded junks.

By craning her neck, she could make out the busy tree-lined road that ran alongside the river and a few of the marble and sandstone-faced buildings that ran along this side of the road.

Unlike the other streets she had seen, these buildings didn't have the festooned banners that were the norm in the rest of the city, though light glinted from the occasional plaque.

Once she had seen enough to work out that she was somewhere on the Bund, the high-class area the Doctor had told her about, she went to the door and gently tried the handle. She was quite surprised that it actually opened.

Mr Woo was in his office, listening to a conversation emanating from a speaker. At the moment, the switchboard indicator for table number six was lit up, where Du Yue Sheng was having an informal meeting with one of his subordinates.

It was fascinating listening. 'Ying,' Du's voice was saying, 'there are two reasons why I am unhappy with this news.

Firstly, if Chiang Kai-Shek discovers that his Minister of Opium Suppression has failed to prevent the resurgence of the Black Scorpion's opium traffic, he will probably have me shot.'

'Wishful thinking,' Woo muttered. Rondo flexed his massive fists in agreement.

'Secondly, they are cutting into our profits. The French government get an annual cut of twenty million dollars as it is, just for us to have an unmolested base of operations in their Concession. I don't care whether you arrest them or dump them in the Huangpu, but I will not tolerate opium smuggling by others on the Great Circle's territory. Now what has happened to Sung-Chi Li?'

'I don't know,' another voice replied. 'He was pursuing a suspect last evening and may have been caught in the air raid.'

'I don't care about air raids. I want him found, then this case closed. What else can I do right now?'

Rondo shook his head glumly and mimed firing two guns.

'Sorry,' Woo said. 'What do you think would happen to us if I killed the Chief of the Bureau for Opium Suppression?' Rondo shrugged, massive brows furrowing, and moved around the desk.

Woo looked up at the sound of stumbling footsteps. The woman he had rescued from the air-raid wreckage was backing away from Rondo while at the same time hefting a handy table-lamp in a threatening manner. He had forgotten how independent westerners liked to be or he might have expected her to enter without being told. 'It's all right, Rondo; go and check last evening's takings, will you?'

Rondo nodded and turned away, while the woman looked towards Woo. Her sculpted features wore a mask of suspicion.

Woo wondered what it would take to crack that mask. Perhaps on Wei Pei's day off, he might find out... 'You must excuse Rondo; he

sometimes doesn't realize how intimidating he can be.' Woo laid the paper aside, and stood with a slight bow. He waved towards the seats. 'Please sit; you must still be quite weak after having a building fall on top of you.' He went to a bookcase and slid it aside to reveal a small personal bar. 'I have a few bottles of particularly fine Solero imported for personal use.'

The woman didn't answer, but he noticed her eyes briefly flick suspiciously down towards the cheongsam she was wearing. He should have anticipated that and had Wei Pei remain with her when she awoke. 'Oh, Wei Pei – the maid – put you to bed; your blushes are spared.' He didn't know whether she would believe him, and didn't care; it was the truth, and that was that.

'I suppose I ought to thank you for rescuing me, then, Mr...?'

'Mr Woo. I happened to be passing at the time, Miss...?'

'Romana, no Miss. I have to wonder about the generosity of someone who plots to kill his government's law and order minister.'

Woo didn't mind what she had overheard. What could she do? 'There's a saying – a patriot is someone willing to defend his country against its government. You're new to Shanghai?'

'You could put it that way.'

'Anyone who has been here long knows that Du Yue Sheng is also Tenth Uncle of the Great Circle Tong; he's the biggest opium dealer in the Yellow Sea.'

'Then he's in the wrong job, surely?'

'Hardly!' Her naivety was quite refreshing. 'He's legally entitled to kill his rivals and is hardly likely to arrest himself.'

A benefit of being willing to crusade against the Communists on behalf of Chiang Kai-Shek.'

'That seems a terribly impractical way to run a government.'

'It gets worse: Chiang's wife's family are Communist sympathizers.' He smiled wistfully. 'I'd give a lot to be able to listen in to their mealtime discussions.'

'So what is he to you?'

‘A blot on society’s face. I’ve spent half my life building up this place so that people can enjoy themselves here. Before too long, the likes of Du made it their favourite location for socializing, which in turn means that the heavy Tong presence as well as irritatingly frequent police raids to trap them tend to scare off the ordinary people who I hoped would spend their money here.’ He held a glass out towards her. ‘If you don’t trust me, there’s a gun in the plant-pot beside you that you could use to defend yourself.’

She reached down and lifted the butt of a pistol from the loam under a potted palm. Then she let it fall back and took the glass. ‘Why did you bring me here?’

‘I could hardly leave you in the rubble and Rondo knows how to patch up minor wounds quite efficiently. He used to wrestle alligators in a circus show, so you can see that first aid is quite a handy skill for him.’ Woo sat. ‘I like to help people when I can.’

Romana took a sip of her drink. ‘Where you found me...didn’t you see anyone else there?’

‘Lots of people – the houses were occupied, after all. Some survived, some didn’t. Your friend with the scarf was being dragged out by some people, but I didn’t see where they took him.’

Romana rounded on him. ‘I didn’t describe the Doctor’s clothes...Of course, you’re the man from the docks; the one the police call Yan Cheh. That’s the only way you could know what the Doctor looks like.’

Woo had expected this; it was inevitable that she would make the connection to his motorcycling identity at some point after being brought back to the club. All good things must end; even secrecy. ‘It’s not a name I’d have picked, but it’s quite flattering.’

‘So why do you do it?’

Woo put on a mock-thoughtful look. ‘To repay two debts.’

Romana looked sceptical. ‘Oh, not the financial kind. I have my reasons, just as you undoubtedly have your reasons for interfering at the docks.’ It had occurred to him that she might not approve, but they did share a common goal.

‘A debt to the Tong of the Black Scorpion or Weng-Chiang?’

‘One debt to my club; I’ve told you how the Tongs and police scare all my other customers. The other is to the Sakura Kai, the Cherry Society. My methods are roundabout, but I know what I’m doing. I think you do, too.’

Romana sat on the opposite side of the desk. ‘How do you mean?’

‘Your visits to Nang Tao and the docks in pursuit of Hsien-Ko. I know you and your doctor friend are operating from a British police box on the Waibaidu bridge, but your arrest would suggest that you’re not working in true co-operation between the Settlement Police and the locals. I presume, therefore, that you’re friends of the Fallen Angel.’

‘That’s an interesting deduction,’ Romana said guardedly.

Woo took that as a sign that he was right. ‘I think we’ve been working on the same problem from opposite ends and it might be wise to pool our resources. I know the Black Scorpion have found some way to avoid detection while travelling –’

‘Avoid detection? Then you haven’t seen what happens. We really have to find the Doctor; he knows more about the Black Scorpion than I do, but if they’ve found a way of exploiting the fourth segment...’

‘Segment of what?’

‘Of a key the Doctor and I have been searching for. Can you take me back to where you found me?’

‘Of course, but as I said, your friend has gone.’

‘I have some equipment in the car that could help find him. It also detects what I suspect to be the Black Scorpion’s mode of transportation.’

‘Why didn’t you say so before?’ Woo stood, eager to get on with the search. He paused; Romana wasn’t exactly equipped to go tracking down the Black Scorpion. ‘Come over here.’

The shelves on the far part of the dog-leg that was Woo’s office were filled with rather less civil equipment. A polished hardwood rack at waist level held a set of samurai swords with inlaid decorations on the scabbards. Above that, there were two rows of pistols. The lower shelf held revolvers: a Webley .38, a rare eight-round version of the Webley-Fosbery .455 automatic revolver, a Smith & Wesson .45, a Colt Single Action Army – ironically known as the Peacemaker – and

an Enfield .38. On the uppermost shelf were several automatics: the ubiquitous Luger, a Walther PP, a pair of Browning Hi-Powers and a pair of Colt .45s.

Romana raised an eyebrow disapprovingly. 'Do you really need all these to run a restaurant and nightclub?'

'You wouldn't believe the viciousness of some of those Michelin critics.' Woo unlocked the cabinet and lifted out the Walther PP since it was slightly smaller and lighter than the others and so should be better suited for Romana. 'I'd suggest a.25 Beretta for you – it's got no stopping power, but it's easy to operate and I've heard it described as fancy-looking to appeal to the ladies. As it happens, though, I haven't got one, so this'll have to do.'

'You seem to know a lot about guns.'

'Oh? Maybe about women. Do you know how to use one of these?'

'I took the Academy marksmanship trophy for my year.'

She took the gun from him and examined it. 'It's very primitive...Where's the energy regulator?'

Woo took the question in his stride and smiled wryly. He took the gun back and lifted a magazine from a drawer below the shelf. 'Watch closely. You have eight rounds to a magazine, which goes here.' He slapped it into the butt and it clicked into place. 'Pulling the slide back and releasing it like this forces the first round into the chamber. Then press this lever down with your thumb to make it safe. When you want to shoot, flick the safety catch back up with your thumb, aim and squeeze the trigger. When you've used all eight shots, the slide will jam back until you either release the locking catch or insert a new magazine.' Another thought struck him. 'Have you ever fired in anger?'

'Just once, a few weeks ago on Zanak. I'd rather avoid doing it again.'

Woo had never heard of Zanak, though he prided himself on a grasp of general knowledge. It was probably some little African colony out by the Belgian Congo. 'Wouldn't we all?'

He handed back the Walther, and lifted down the pair of Colt.45 automatics. He went back to the telephone and lifted the receiver. 'Rondo, prepare a car for myself and Romana.'

Most Chinese temples were colourful affairs, painted in the colours of red for joy, green for harmony and gold for glory.

The one in which Hsien-Ko stood was very different. Sited almost inaccessibly at the heart of a long-dead volcanic crater far from Shanghai, it was a jagged mausoleum of black, grey and white: the colours of disaster and death. Obsidian dragons guarded the approaches to the temple, a task usually performed by sculpted lions. It could almost have been taken for a natural feature if nature built scalloped-roofed halls with guardian dragon statues.

In addition to corroding brass gongs and trumpets, and instruments carved from the horns of unidentifiable beasts, there was an offering bowl before the main hall and altar.

Behind the altar was a huge basalt dragon with long fangs and five claws on each foot. In imperial times only the emperor was allowed to possess images of five-clawed dragons.

Anyone else found with one was put to death. The Black Scorpion had never settled for second best, and so adopted the five-clawed dragon. Volcanic steam oozed continuously from its mouth while candles burned in eye-sockets lined with beaten silver.

A couple of Black Scorpion officers were renewing their loyalty to Weng-Chiang: cutting open their palms and allowing the blood to drip into the pitted offering bowl, where it sizzled, heated by steam from far below.

Hsien-Ko despised this place but occasionally came anyway, because it would disturb her followers if she did not.

It was a small price to pay for her position, but one of so many small prices. When counted together, they totalled far too much.

The officers left her in peace, deferring to her rank, and she knelt in front of the dragon. She didn't feel particularly subservient, but anything else would look odd to anyone who came by. She looked up at the snarling beast, envisioning how the image must have terrified the peasants of Szechuan two millennia ago.

'The Black Scorpion prospers, doesn't it?' she asked the dragon softly. Naturally, it didn't answer. 'Most of them don't remember you, of course, but they long for the old days when Weng-Chiang came among men. They work eagerly, you know, to help facilitate your return.' She didn't really believe that her god could hear her, of course, but saying

the words somehow made her feel better.

She had longed for this all her life: to tell Weng-Chiang how his unique knowledge had shaped the Tong's activities, not to mention her life. She wondered what he would think of his resurrection, and the fact that he had died already.

If the reports handed down by the survivors of the Black Scorpion's stronghold in London were to be believed, he would rage. The Tong had a long memory and the tales of Weng-Chiang's moods had been passed down in whispered tones for years. Such anger was just what she would have expected of him, but it wasn't something she had any desire to see for herself.

The concept never failed to amaze her, yet it amused her too. She had long since decided to tell Weng-Chiang the story when she met him; of how he, the magician Li H'sen Chang and his mechanical killer, Mister Sin, had searched the world for his Time Cabinet, until he found it in London. All the while, he had been forced to reduce girls like herself to proteins in order to keep himself alive. At the last, though, he had come up against a mysterious stranger calling himself the Doctor, and a girl named Leela. They had thwarted Chang and finally faced Weng-Chiang in the House of the Dragon, which subsequently burnt to the ground.

There had been witnesses, though, who reported back to China. They couched their report in terms of Weng-Chiang's having returned to the spirit world, but Hsien-Ko didn't believe that for a moment. Weng-Chiang had perished in his own organic distillation cabinet. She found it comforting that this suggested there was some sort of justice after all. Some, but not enough. For that, only human ingenuity could deliver the necessary goods.

She straightened in front of the basalt dragon, thinking about the efforts the Tong were applying to bring Weng-Chiang back from oblivion. 'And I...I work hardest of all. I know that sounds prideful, but it happens to be true. It won't be long now, before we meet face to... whatever. There's so much I want to tell you, but it can wait. You will know it all soon enough.' She stood. 'But I must go now; to arrange for the defence of the place where we shall meet.' She nodded to herself. 'We will speak again.'

Nine

Woo led Romana downstairs to the immaculately clean garage built into the rear of the Club Do-San. Every instrument and tool gleamed on its shelf and there wasn't a patch of oil to be seen on the floor slabs. Woo tugged on the lever that operated the door and it slid up to reveal the courtyard and loading area which the club shared with its neighbouring buildings. A narrow street directly opposite led out of the square.

Rondo, meanwhile, gently peeled back a protective tarpaulin from one of the four cars in the garage. It was a two-seat sports car mostly in red and grey, though the covers for the folding top and spare wheel were a light tan. The wheel hubs were a sunburst of scarlet spokes, surrounded by whitewall tyres. The four thick tubes that emerged from the engine and disappeared under the car to link up with the exhaust pipe were as silvered as the mirror-like front grille.

Rondo held the passenger door open so that Romana could slide into the plush leather seat. He looked at Woo almost pleadingly and wiped a spot of dust off the top of the radiator grille. 'Don't worry,' Woo promised him, 'I won't get a scratch on her.'

'I thought this was your car,' Romana said.

Woo shrugged helplessly. 'It is but Rondo looks after the collection. He's worse than my mother. Of course, this one is rather special...'

'It is?'

'It's a Duesenberg SSJ. There are only two more of them in the world. The colour scheme is too conspicuous, but changing it ourselves would lower its value.' Woo started the car and they roared off out through the courtyard.

* * *

Sung-Chi Li was taking some hot soup in an impromptu air-raid shelter that was originally a hotel's wine cellar. Most of the occupants were women and children in a bizarre selection of hand-me-downs from the discarded clothes of several nationalities. They had obviously not spent much time near the International Settlement as they were staring in fascination at Li's unconscious prisoner. He didn't think much of having to come here but he wanted his prisoner in one piece,

at least until after interrogation.

The position of police inspector had changed a lot since Li inherited it from his father; and city policework was much more complex than that in the village where he had begun.

There he would have been more respected, with the power to take whatever action he deemed necessary against anyone of whom he felt suspicious. Civilization, western-style, had a lot to answer for, not least for making his job much more difficult. Now they would make anyone a policeman, regardless of family history, so long as they could pass a few simple tests. He didn't know how they could expect him to trust or respect someone who had not been properly born into the job.

Well, actually, yes he did; they expected him to follow the rules. It was just that back in the old village, the rules had been much simpler and more effective.

It was morning now and he had already spent far too much time in this hole in the ground. His wife would be wondering what had happened to him, and he wanted to get on so that he could get back and reassure her that he hadn't been flattened in the rubble. She had always been rather highly strung, but he didn't mind since she was an excellent cook. He nudged the Doctor none too gently with his foot. 'Wake up, we're –'

The Doctor suddenly sat bolt upright, his face lighting up.

'Of course! How could I have been so stupid? Telluric node interstices!'

Li started. This wasn't the fuzzy sluggishness he had been expecting from a man just coming round from unconsciousness. 'What?'

'Tellur – Oh, it's you.' The Doctor looked downcast.

'Where's Romana?'

'The last I saw, your friend Yan Cheh was pulling her out of your car.'

'Yan Cheh? Oh, good. Who is he?'

'Let's not play games, Doctor. You were at the Tong safe house; was that a coincidence?'

‘Well, that’s a really stupid question, since you’ve obviously decided the answer already. I mean, if I say yes, you’ll think I’m bound to say that and take it as proof of guilt, and if I say no, you’ll take it as a confession. That is how this works, isn’t it? I just like spending time in pubs. You meet all sorts of interesting people there. You know, gamblers, smugglers, actors, Black Scorpions...’ He raised his right hand to ruffle his hair and dragged Li’s left hand along with it at the other end of the handcuffs. ‘Anyway, if you are an officer of the law, you know I’m innocent until proven guilty.’

Li pulled their hands back down angrily. ‘Whatever gives you that idea? This is China, not Britain or America.’

‘Aha! I’ve got you, then. You want me to prove I’m innocent of involvement in an arms deal at the docks, right?’

Actually, Li didn’t; he was perfectly happy to convict the Doctor and get away on leave. Unfortunately, the Doctor had a point. There was an ordered scheme of things, and one of those things was that prisoners should have a chance to tell their side of the story. Many of Li’s colleagues wouldn’t have bothered with that bit, but he knew that order provided life’s only certainties. ‘Can you prove your story?’

‘Easily. When we find the woman who was in charge at the docks, she won’t recognize me, since we’ve never met.’ He cleared his throat discreetly. ‘Actually, she’ll probably try to kill me once she knows that I know what she was doing there, but I don’t imagine that will bother you too much. It won’t bother you, will it?’

Li raised his left hand, the handcuff chain tugging at the Doctor’s arm. ‘It won’t if she’s a very good shot.’

The Doctor gave him a facial shrug which Li thought was irritating. Things were getting out of control here – or at least out of his control. ‘Listen – what’s your interest in this arms deal?’ asked the Doctor. ‘I thought you were investigating a murder.’

Li wondered how much he should own up to – he didn’t want to give any information which would have been proof of guilt if the Doctor already knew it. Still, it was proof of innocence that was the question now. ‘A stevedore’s pass was found at the opium den where we found the body of the man you killed. We set up a watch on the docks to see what the connection was.’

‘Whose body was it?’

Li grunted; so the Doctor claimed not to know his victim.

Were even the *gwai lo* indulging in random murder now? 'I'm told he was a caretaker at the Palace Theatrical Museum in London.'

The Doctor looked up sharply. 'Theatrical Museum? Music hall relics?'

'I imagine so.'

'Was this museum by any chance halfway between Limehouse and Fleet Street?'

Li was pleased; he didn't know London's layout, but the Doctor's familiarity with it was a good sign. 'Perhaps.'

'Yes...' The Doctor rubbed at his cheek. 'There's something very odd going on here, Sung-Chi Li, and I hope you have your priorities right. That knife I found – did you have it analysed?'

'The blood was –'

'No, no, no. I mean the metallic composition of the blade. You'll find it's like no substance you have ever seen before, and that's not the only thing.'

'No?'

'No. You followed us out into the country and back to the city; how do you think that instant journey was accomplished, eh?'

Li was trying not to think of it at all. It wasn't rational.

There were still tales of renegade sorcerers working for the KMT or the Communists. He would have no truck with such talk, though. His father had brought him up to believe only in fact and evidence, all neatly ordered for easy understanding. If people knew their place, as Li did, then it was logical that they should know the place of things in the world around them.

'You tell me.'

'I think someone has found a way of exploiting the telluric interstices.'

'What does that gibberish mean?' Other than the hope of an insanity plea, he added mentally.

'They say here that the journey of a thousand miles begins with but a

single step. If I'm right, then a journey of a thousand miles will take but a single step.'

Li was about to denounce this nonsense when he recalled the dead caretaker, who had been seen alive in London only hours before his men found him. 'Or even six thousand eight hundred miles? From London to the opium den... And that woman was there, too.' It was a crazy idea, but he had experienced that sudden return to the city himself...The ability to do such a thing would be beyond value, not least to his employers. Control travel, and you had gone quite a long way towards controlling the crime levels, since criminals then could not move away from where you sought them. 'All right, Doctor. I'll give you your chance – but just remember I have a gun.'

'Really? My condolences; I hope it clears up soon.'

Li was baffled by that. Insanity plea, definitely. 'How are we going to find this woman?'

The Doctor grinned, and produced a silver whistle. 'With a bloodhound.'

* * *

The somewhat singed olive and mustard-coloured tail-fin of the Japanese bomber still poked out from the smouldering rubble when Woo's Duesenberg braked to a halt. Street urchins scarcely looked up from their search for souvenirs as the dapper club owner and the elegant lady stepped out of the car.

Romana surveyed the wreckage with an ill-disguised shiver. 'You pulled me out of that?'

Woo nodded. 'There wasn't much left of your car. I don't know whether this equipment of yours will be intact.'

She looked at him coolly. 'Actually K9 is built more solidly than the car was.'

'Canine? A dog?'

Romana hesitated. 'Well, sort of...'

Woo thought back to the previous day when he had seen them leave the police station. There had been that mechanical contraption... 'The metal thing?'

‘He’s actually a very sophisticated computer.’

Woo had seen some American film serials, with their ridiculous robots, but the metal dog had been something quite different. There was that remote-controlled mini-tank the German military were experimenting with for demolition purposes, of course; perhaps this K9 was a product of similar developments in Britain.

Romana scrambled across the shattered brickwork, pulling chunks away from the car. Woo wondered if that crack to her skull was more serious than Rondo had thought. He joined her in trying to clear the top half of the car.

Before long, the back door was clear and Woo could see a pair of close-set red eyes glowing in the darkness, like those of the spirit of some neglected ancestor. Romana leaned in, and Woo started forward to restrain her from this possible danger.

‘K9, are you all right?’ she asked solicitously.

‘I have sustained minor impact damage to outer casing, but all primary functions are unimpaired, mistress.’

‘It speaks?’ Woo was astounded.

‘Of course he speaks!’ Romana sounded vaguely affronted.

‘How else would we communicate?’

Woo hadn’t thought of that; he had assumed the machine was merely a mobile weapon. ‘Doesn’t he bark?’

‘Woof, ruff, yelp, howl,’ K9 said curtly. ‘Canine vocal effects completed. Assistance required, mistress.’

Romana leaned into the wrecked car and heaved K9 out to the edge of the door. ‘Take hold of him, Woo.’ Together they lowered K9 to the ground. K9’s antennae waggled briefly and his head moved around on its flexible neck. ‘All internal systems and motors functioning normally.’ His body raised itself slightly above his traction system to allow the drive and idler wheels to move freely over the rough terrain and he made for the nearest undamaged section of road.

Woo followed, speechless for once, while Romana caught up with the automaton as its body shell settled once it was on the road next to the Duesenberg. She looked round at Woo with a troubled expression and

knelt beside K9. 'K9, can your sensors detect the Doctor?'

K9 rotated slowly, his antennae whirring. 'Affirmative, mistress. The Doctor-master has been calling for several minutes.'

Romana nodded. 'Good, we can go and fetch him.'

Woo shook his head. 'I doubt that would be a good idea. If he's still with the police, I can't risk you being arrested too. We should find out more about Hsien-Ko first. I know where she lives, but we won't be able to visit her easily. She occasionally comes into the club, and as you saw I have all the tables monitored by closed-circuit radio. Then we can free your friend by informing the police about her.'

'That could take too long and Hsien-Ko is using a level of technology your police just couldn't possibly understand yet. Still, K9 is better suited to rescue the Doctor than I would be.'

She knelt beside the automaton. 'K9, go and find the Doctor. Tell him I'm at the Club Do-San, and that we know where to find the Black Scorpion's leader.'

'Affirmative, mistress.' K9 turned and glided off past the rubble.

'All right, Woo, let's go and think of a way to find out how the Tong are able to move over miles instantaneously.'

Woo opened the car door for her. 'If you're going to be around the club for a while, we'll need a cover for you.'

'Maintenance engineer?'

That would hardly be a suitable occupation for a lady, Woo thought, though he knew that the Nationalist Army did have such postings for women. That probably explained why the Japanese had taken Manchukuo so easily. 'I think not. Tell me, can you sing?'

* * *

Hsien-Ko set her little companion on the ground and allowed a coolie to take the pram away. She had returned to her mansion and she now entered it quickly. 'Go back to your room,' she instructed. 'You needn't do anything more today.'

Her companion in the private-school uniform walked off towards the nursery, head bowed in disappointment. He did so like to play. It

would not be long, however, before Kwok returned. They would carry their gains from Kanamaruhara to Utsonomiya, where the trucks had been left, and then drive back here. With only a dozen geomantic compasses, vehicles were needed to transport any reasonable number of people, and the number of paths wide enough to take a vehicle were limited to certain locations.

It seemed such a long time since she had discovered the Dragon Paths; while on a visit to a neighbouring village when she was twelve, a gang of youths had been chasing her with rape in mind. She had turned into a dead end and thought she was finished. Then, to her surprise, she had found herself skidding to a halt in the street outside her home.

Her mother had been worried that day, but when she found Hsien-Ko safely at home, she assumed that the girl had run across country. Hsien-Ko didn't know how to explain it and so decided it was safer not to bother. Once she had paid her coin to the Tong, however, it quickly became apparent that the ability was very useful in her new trade. So were its side-effects: she was barren and as there was only really one means of entry into the Tong for women, one who couldn't bear children was therefore even more valued. She should have run on those occasions too. Meeting Kwok for the first time was just about the only other thing that had affected her as much as discovering the Dragon Paths.

That, and her father's death. He had bequeathed her this house, which she had never even known existed. She often wondered if he had found its size and emptiness as odd as she did. It could probably house the entire population of their little nameless village.

It was so large that she sometimes felt terribly alone in it, even when Kwok was with her. At such times, she could easily imagine that they were the only occupants of a dead and deserted world. He didn't understand it, of course, and that sometimes made her feel lonelier still. At such times, there was nothing better than to hold him and relax in the feeling of comfort.

She went upstairs to change into something more savoury than the Japanese garb. It amused her to think of the enemy's materials being used against them, though she didn't really feel comfortable with the need. If only that nurse had not got herself killed, she could have played the part of the Japanese woman. It wouldn't be long, though, before her part would be finished, and she and Kwok could get out of the business and live more comfortably somewhere else.

In a way, the thought was saddening, for she knew that – barring accidents – she would outlive Kwok, along with everyone else. At first she had tried to tell herself that she didn't care for him at all, but it hadn't worked, and thinking about their future life led her naturally to wonder what life would be like after losing him. She would have to come to terms with it someday, but so far the idea always chilled her, making her need his reassuring presence even more.

Fear bred, she knew, and it could be borne of love as well as of anything else.

* * *

The Doctor gave another three inaudible blasts of the whistle, then grimaced. 'You'd think he would have got here by now.'

He and Li were sitting at a rice stall on the street, still chained together. This was the old Chinese city, rarely visited by foreigners, so many passers-by paused to stare at the Doctor, never having seen a non-Chinese before. Nobody seemed bothered that he was handcuffed and Li suspected it was because they didn't realize that this wasn't a normal state for a westerner.

'The city is no place for a dog,' Li observed. He was beginning to wonder if he had been taken for a ride.

'K9 is no ordinary dog.' A chorus of startled cries and shouts rose from along the street, and several coolies and porters jumped into the middle of the road to get out of the way of whatever was approaching. Whatever it was was too low to be visible through the crowd, and Li drew his gun just to be on the safe side.

The crowd parted and a squarish metal construction in the vague shape of a dog slid up to them. 'I'd put away the gun if I were you,' the Doctor said in a low voice. 'Guns make him nervous.' Li did so but kept his hand near it, just in case. He had never seen anything quite like this thing. The Doctor glared at it. 'What kept you? No, never mind. Where is Romana?'

'Mistress Romana is at the Club Do-San. She said to tell you that she has located the whereabouts of the leaders of the Tong of the Black Scorpion.'

The Doctor grinned. Li was only frustrated; he had spent days piecing together the Black Scorpion's movements, and it was galling for some damned *deus ex machina* to come and deliver their address. 'Well?

Where is it?’

‘Mistress Romana did not say. Logic would suggest meeting to discuss the subject.’

‘Yes, well, I think the inspector would like to compare notes about me with the Black Scorpion a little earlier than that. Do you remember what I taught you about being a bloodhound?’

‘All memory is fully accessible.’

‘Good, good.’ The Doctor produced the locket he had taken from the assassin at the police station, and opened it to reveal the geomantic compass. ‘Scan this blood sample again.’

K9’s probe extended. ‘Cellular structure patterned and memorized.’

‘Good dog; now, scan for a matching cellular genetic pattern. I want to find the original owner of this blood.’

‘Scanning.’

Li gave the Doctor a blank look. ‘If that belonged to a Tong soldier, the chances are that any blood on it was from some street girl they killed to avoid paying her fee.’

‘All the assassins who tried to kill us in your station had lockets like this, with the same blood type. That means the blood is all from the same person for a reason. Now, either it belongs to the woman from the docks, or to someone else who is valuable to the Tong as a mascot and therefore still alive.

Either way, it’s likely to lead us to their headquarters.’ Li nodded. It made sense of sorts, but things were not that simple these days.

‘Pattern match detected,’ K9 announced after a few moments. ‘Bearing two-two-seven degrees, fourteen point three kilometres.’

‘We’ll take my car,’ Li said in a tone that was clearly not that of a mere suggestion.

‘Warning, master. Blood sample is highly charged with chronons.’

The Doctor gaped. ‘What? That blood is a chronon radiation source?’

‘Affirmative. The iron content in the red cells has been temporally polarized by chronon decay.’

‘That’s impossible!’ He looked at Li. ‘Don’t you think it’s impossible?’

Li pulled him towards the car. ‘I think this whole case is impossible.’

* * *

The two armed guards who flanked the main door scarcely gave Kwok a second glance as he strolled into the house. It had taken far too long to carry the stolen goods to Utsonomiya, even though the thirty-seven-mile journey was accomplished with one step. He hoped that next time Hsien-Ko would choose a target situated on a Dragon Path they could drive through.

Hsien-Ko was in the dining-room eating a late breakfast.

She had changed into a black trouser-suit of light silk and unbound her hair so that it could fall between her shoulderblades. Kwok bent to nuzzle her neck before sitting beside her. ‘Did you get everything?’ she asked.

‘Yes. The trucks will be at the Arch by now and will return for the guns at dusk.’

‘Good. Feng’s still on duty, if you want something to eat.’

Kwok shook his head, getting up to leave. ‘I want to have all Vogler’s guns checked, just in case.’

‘Don’t you trust anyone?’

He sat back down, taking her hand. ‘Only you.’ He had never quite known why that was the case. He had met her at the plagiaristic Canton Club, where one of Hsien-Ko’s late rivals had decided to set up a Chinese version of America’s Cotton Club. The Canton Club had been wrecked in the air strike from the Japanese aircraft carrier *Hosho* back in 1932.

He had been a lowly bouncer then, and she a regular visitor to the offices upstairs, where trade agreements between Tongs were thrashed out – sometimes literally. She had asked to borrow his car on the first night and he had allowed it, though it was foolish. He had instinctively felt that he had known her long enough for her to earn his trust, though intellectually he knew better.

He was quite surprised when she returned it the next night, and surprised again that it hadn’t been used in some crime.

After a few days he felt that he'd always known her. After a few weeks they were engaged to be married. But...

But this business of hers had to be finished first. It was important to her, so he knew better than to deny her it. Indeed, he wholeheartedly approved, once the reality of the Dragon Paths had been proved to him. To do so, she had taken him to New York in the wink of an eye.

He had seen the potential immediately the shock had worn off.

More than that, he had seen how intelligent and imaginative she was to have exploited her discovery like this.

He wished they could travel together more often, to enjoy each other's reactions to every new location.

They would travel again, he was sure, once this business was finished. Then he would never be apart from her again.

Every time they parted, he was secretly terrified that he would lose her, and so he went on the more dangerous trips himself.

He didn't fear death half as much as he feared loss.

Soon, though, he could relax. Everything was progressing as planned.

* * *

The Doctor and Li peered through the shrubbery at the landscaped gardens which surrounded the mansion on three sides. Croquet hoops were set into a flat lawn, while a carefully arranged stone garden surrounded a wide pool filled with daintily coloured fish. A low bridge arched over the pool for decorative effect.

A gravel driveway went round to the front of the house on the far side. The Doctor looked at K9 who was between the two men. 'Are you sure this is the place?'

'Affi-' The Doctor clapped a hand over his snout, muffling the sound from his speaker mouth.

'Shh! You're supposed to whisper when breaking and entering. Didn't they teach you anything at obedience school?'

'Obedience school negative,' K9 replied at a lower volume.

'Massive increase in chronons locally.'

‘I imagine there would be...’

Li had little time for this sort of behaviour; it wasn’t getting the job done. ‘Obviously he thinks this is the right place. Now let’s go in and find out whether any of those people from the docks are here.’ A deep rumbling and growling started up from the front of the house, and a series of trucks moved along the drive. They all bore the Tsingtao Breweries logo.

The Doctor snapped his fingers ‘K9; follow those trucks and keep an eye on them. Off you go.’ K9 reversed back into the shrubbery and disappeared off on his own. ‘This would be easier if you’d unlock these cuffs.’

‘I’ve lost enough face to you already. Trust has to be earned.’ Determined to reassert his control of the situation, Li circled to the right around the fish pool, dragging the Doctor with him. He didn’t get very far before bumping into what felt like a more solid branch. He turned to push it aside and saw that it was in fact a leg. One of three pairs of legs, belonging to grim-faced men who were pointing rifles at them.

The Doctor stood with a disarming grin. ‘Ah, you must be the valets. My friend and I were just wondering if you would be kind enough to show us to the lady of the house.’

Li glared at him. ‘I’m a police officer –’ he brandished their cuffed wrists by way of proof ‘– and this man is my prisoner. I just want to ask your employer a few questions.’

The Doctor coughed. ‘Well, I thought my way was better, but if you want to do things the dull way, then don’t blame me if they don’t serve the tea on the best china.’

‘Look, I’m just doing my job.’

The nearest guard jerked his head towards the front of the house. ‘This way. Move.’

Ten

Kwok had found the guns to be satisfactory. Vogler had been an honest dealer after all; it would have been worth using him again. He locked the storeroom door when he left, and almost bumped into a uniformed guard who was crossing the courtyard towards him. The soldier saluted. ‘*Dai lo*, we’ve caught two intruders. The policeman and the *gwai lo* from the Gongpinglu Wharf.’

‘The Doctor?’ The guard nodded, and Kwok was chilled.

These men were hunting Hsien-Ko, and now they had found her. ‘Hold them until I warn Hsien-Ko.’ The guard nodded again and ran off. Kwok went back into the house through the kitchens and returned to the dining-room. She wasn’t there.

After a few minutes, he found Hsien-Ko taking in the morning air on the balcony outside her suite. He was a little surprised: she usually preferred to relax in a pool she had found some time ago on a journey through the Dragon Paths.

Kwok had been there with her many times and had judged it to be in South America somewhere, but still didn’t know exactly where it was. Probably neither did she. ‘Hsien-Ko,’ he said as impassively as he could – he was still on duty, after all – ‘the perimeter guards have caught two intruders by the fish pool. One of them’s the policeman who was at the safe house and the docks; the other is the *gwai lo* who was at the docks, the one you called Doctor.’

Hsien-Ko turned, a wry look creeping across her face.

‘Well, I suppose that explains why the men you sent to the police station failed to return.’ She didn’t sound too concerned, Kwok noted.

‘Was I wrong to send them?’ He had thought she would be pleased by his initiative.

‘Of course not; there are always such formalities to be observed. Now that those formalities are past, we can get down to business. Bring the intruders to the dining-room; I’ll be along in a moment. I have to prepare for a trip to Hsinking this afternoon.’

‘Hsinking?’

‘The Japanese Twelfth Army is only a few miles north of the Jade Emperor, and I don’t want them coming any closer. At least not until we are in a position to avoid them. The thought occurs that if the officer in charge of strategic planning was out of the way, along with all the written orders, requisitions and intelligence reports...’

‘Their advance would be halted until a replacement was found.’ Kwok understood perfectly, though he knew that she would not be looking forward to killing. Nor should she. He nodded. ‘I’ll go. This is not for you –’

‘He won’t obey anyone else quite as well. You know that. Bring in the intruders.’

He turned to go, wishing she would let him bear the burden of guilt for what had to be done. ‘Wait.’ She frowned, looking around oddly as if trying to remember something. ‘A box...Spread the word that the men should look out for a large blue box, perhaps the size of a walk-in cupboard. It should be much the same as the police boxes we saw in London yesterday.’

‘I don’t see why, but all ri–’ Kwok broke off, recalling his trip through town that morning. ‘I’ve seen a box like that...It was on the Waibaidu bridge; I thought it was odd, because I’d never noticed anything like it there before. I assumed the Settlement Police had set it up as a little corner of home.’

Hsien-Ko’s answering smile almost glowed. ‘Excellent! Send a truck to collect it. I’ll want it taken to the Jade Emperor when we go there. How many guards are with the intruders?’

‘All the patrols are in threes.’

‘Make it five. I don’t imagine our guests will be any danger to us, but fewer guards than that would be an insult to the Doctor.’

* * *

The Doctor and Li had been thrust unceremoniously into a well-fitted dining-room that might have belonged in some elegant French chateau. Li’s gun had been confiscated by the guards and the contents of their pockets had been deposited on a silver platter. The long mahogany table that filled the centre of the room had place settings for up to twelve people, and the silver platter was left at the end nearest the doors. Two impassive guards stood by the door, while three more blocked the three large bay windows.

Li wasn't used to being in this situation, and wasn't sure how to handle it. All he knew was that he should be the one guarding them. The Doctor dropped into a chair, forcing Li to sit next to him, and rattled the rim of a glass with a fork.

‘Shop!’

The guards ignored him. ‘What are you doing?’ Li hissed.

The Doctor would shame him by behaving so chaotically.

‘Demanding better service, though I think a takeaway might be more reassuring. I mean, if they’re going to put us in a dining-room, they might as well feed us.’ Li was about to respond with a warning to be quiet, when the door opened and Kwok, accompanied by the green-eyed woman, entered the room. Li was surprised to see that the lithe pockmarked warrior now had a bandaged eye.

The woman’s glance barely lit on Li, and rested on the Doctor. She nodded faintly to herself, then turned the movement into a slight bow. ‘Please excuse the delay. I am Hsien-Ko, and this is Mr Kwok. I’m very glad you could join us.’

The Doctor jumped to his feet, startling Kwok into reaching for his gun. Hsien-Ko, however, stayed his hand before the weapon was half drawn. ‘You must be our hostess. I am very pleased to meet you at last. This is Inspector Li, and I’m th–’

‘The honour is all mine, Doctor. I trust you’re both comfortable?’ Li felt a surge of satisfaction, then a rapid chill.

That they knew each other proved the Doctor had lied, but then this visit could be a trap, since Li was now a man alone against all these guards.

‘Oh, very comfortable. Nice place you have here – one of Sassoon’s?’

‘Thank you, and no.’ She rifled through the oddments of sweets and technological junk on the platter, finally retrieving the Tong assassin’s locket the Doctor had kept. She smiled sweetly after opening it to glance at the geomantic compass within. ‘My father had it built based upon a house he once stayed at in France: Vaux-leVicomte. The original was built by Louis Quatorze’s finance minister, and legend has it that when Louis saw how impressive it was he immediately had the man jailed for embezzling his funds.’

‘Louis always was headstrong; I did try to warn him that the minister’s brother was head of the Compagnie du Saint Sacrement, but he wouldn’t listen. Had to do things the hard way, did old Louis. That was just the way things were three hundred years ago, of course.’ Li wondered if he could reach his keys on the platter to separate himself from this lunatic without the guards getting jumpy. ‘Aren’t you going to ask us who we are, who we’re working for and what we’re doing snooping around your house?’

‘I could if you really want me to, but since I already know, there wouldn’t be much point to it. You’re the Doctor, you detected the influence of the Dragon Paths – though I’m not sure how – and you saw me at the docks.’ She let the locket spin gently on the end of the chain. ‘You also stole some of my property.’

‘You had an odd choice of people to entrust it to.’

‘Call it a reminder of loyalty.’

‘Ah.’ The Doctor grinned hopefully. ‘In that case, now that you’ve answered my questions, I release you then?’

‘Not quite.’

‘I thought not. You don’t seem very surprised that I talk about meeting someone three hundred years ago.’

‘If you found your way here, you must know that we are members of the Tong of the Black Scorpion. You did cross our path in 1889, and we do have a passing acquaintance with the theoretical possibility of time travel, thanks to our late lamented god, Weng-Chiang.’

‘Magnus Greel was no god.’

‘Of course not!’ She came round the table to sit by the Doctor. She lowered her voice to a more conversational tone.

‘What is a god, eh? Theology was never my strong suit. As I see it, Doctor, those like you and I are gods, so to speak. A god is someone who can truly shape their own destiny; no more, no less. Your interference now is a nuisance, and in shaping my destiny, I like to be free of nuisances.’

‘Ah, you want rid of me. I wondered when you’d get round to that. So, what did you have in mind?’ He snapped his fingers. ‘I’ve got it! Bored to death by revolutionary speeches.’

Hsien-Ko shook her head, and Li could have sworn there was real admiration in her look. 'I should have you shot, but...Two things. Firstly, only your interference now is a nuisance. All your knowledge, and wisdom – oh yes, I know you have a great deal of common sense – that's all raw ore. It's waiting to be refined.' She looked at him with a canted eyebrow. 'We will be friends, later, but not yet. Treason, said Cardinal Richelieu, is a matter of dates; well, so is enmity. Secondly, I owe you one favour, Doctor. You probably don't even know why, but if I'm to honour my ancestors and myself, I must repay the family debt. Once a car is ready, we will take you through the Dragon Path to the Orkney Isles. By the time you travel normally from there back to Shanghai, my work will be finished and so you will not be able to interfere. Afterwards, you may return and we will talk further. Then you'll see that I am not so terrible after all, and we shall become friends.'

'Orkney is not really my preferred climate; couldn't I go to Hawaii instead? Sun, sea, sand and surf; that sort of thing?'

'Or I could kill both yourself and the inspector here.' She shook her head. 'I have no quarrel with you, Doctor; not really.'

'Then the men you sent to kill me didn't really mean it?'

Hsien-Ko laughed; a delightfully musical sound, Li thought, despite the circumstances. 'I see you have a sense of humour. Those men were merely a formality arranged by Kwok here. It was purely business – think nothing of them. To have ignored the threat posed by your abilities would have been an insult to you.'

'Well, I always thought I was man enough to take a few insults. I mean, I know Romana says I can be terribly childish, but –'

'What's wrong with being childish now and again? The more developed the mind, the greater the need for the relaxation of play. What I have to arrange will occur soon, and then I will be gone. Peace will return to the country.'

'Obviously you haven't read the papers lately.'

'The Japanese expansion? That can be nipped in the bud.'

She fell silent, looking away quickly. Li had seen that look before, in the eyes of prisoners who had just incriminated themselves.

'Aren't you going to explain your plans first?'

‘Ah, then you escape and stop me? You’ve been watching too many Republic serials. I am not Gale Sondergaard.’

Li agreed silently. She and Kwok seemed more like some evil version of William Powell and Myrna Loy as Nick and Nora Charles.

‘Can I ask a question?’ the Doctor said, more quietly.

‘If you must.’

‘How are you generating the chronon energy that propels you between telluric interstices?’

‘Generate what?’ Hsien-Ko hastily covered a frown with a demure look. ‘A lady must keep some secrets.’ She stood and turned to the guards. ‘Give them refreshments, but keep them here until their car is ready.’ Beckoning Kwok to follow, she left.

The Doctor stared off into space. ‘So, she doesn’t have the segment...And isn’t generating chronon energy herself.’ He nodded absently. ‘Or at least not consciously...’

* * *

Outside, Hsien-Ko mulled over the conversation as she and Kwok walked round the base of the main staircase. That last question had meant more than it had at first seemed. The Doctor was after something, but what?

Kwok caught her hand, and they stopped. ‘Those two could be dangerous and this house is compromised. Let me kill them for you, beloved; I promise no one will trouble you again.’

‘That is the Tong way and not following it could lose me face, but neglecting a debt to my ancestors would be even more damaging.’ Why, she wondered, wasn’t the Doctor embracing her offer of safe passage. Killing demeaned her most uncomfortably, but she would do it if absolutely necessary. She sighed, resolving not to kill the Doctor. Going by both her father’s notes and the Doctor’s careful hiding of his true thoughts here, he was too intelligent to waste. When Weng-Chiang had been returned to her, she would need the Doctor. He would make an excellent adviser. First, however, he had to be kept separate from her work, so that he would not misunderstand and side against her. ‘Think of it as returning to our roots – the Tongs were originally founded as rebel bands combating oppressive governments. No one ever said they had to be *our* oppressive governments.’

Kwok nodded. 'I know you do what you think best, but you are inexperienced in dealing with troublemakers. The first thing I learned at the Canton Club was that the only sure way to prevent trouble recurring was to knock the troublemaker down so hard he could not get up again.'

'Isn't that why I'm going to Hsinking? The Doctor isn't a troublemaker; more a stroke of ill luck. Let him jinx someone else until the circumstances are different – then this ill luck becomes good fortune. The Doctor has great *ch'i*. I would like to exploit that.'

'After what happened to your father?'

'My father's destiny was set from the moment he left.' She wished that her belief in that view of events could damp the pain.

'I just don't want to see you hurt.'

Concern again; it had always been Kwok's main feature.

How many other men could she say that about? She squeezed his hand gently. 'It's all right. Guard them personally if you like. You can drive them through the Dragon Path to Orkney, to be on the safe side.'

'Why drive? The nearest path large enough to accommodate a car is at the quarry.'

'Would you trust the Doctor with a compass of his own? He would reset it to go somewhere else, and we'd never find him. No, one compass in a car will carry both of them as well as a driver and guard. We've few enough compasses anyway, so I don't want to spare any more.'

He nodded. 'All right. I'll see to it.'

* * *

Li tried to think of a way out of this. The Doctor and the woman seemed connected, but opposites, so that threatening the Doctor probably wouldn't persuade her to release himself and his handcuffed companion. The armed guards were too alert to try anything more direct.

The Doctor leaned back, tilting his hat down over his eyes.

Li looked out of the nearest bay window onto the wide patio.

Hsien-Ko was there with her back to them, now wearing her white overcoat. A little boy in a sailor-type uniform was with her. Li had seen such outfits before, worn by Japanese children in their Concession. It was their school uniform apparently.

Did this mean that the Black Scorpion were resorting to hostage-holding? It was certainly a long tradition.

Hsien-Ko and the child walked down the steps towards a waiting car that flew the rising sun emblem. Once they had got in, the car drove off out of view. Li was so frustrated he could feel his blood boiling. He ran his free hand over his widow's peak. 'Aren't we going to escape?' At least then he could lock up the Doctor and throw away the key.

'What is the first thing you would do if two intruders who had compromised your security got away from you?' the Doctor murmured.

'Move.'

'Exactly. What we want is to escape in such a way that they don't know we've escaped until after we've been back here for a proper look round.'

Li considered this. 'In the car?'

'Who's going to miss a prisoner who has already been taken away?'

* * *

The Kwantung Army Intelligence headquarters at Hsinking was a large three-winged edifice five storeys high. The roof had been modified at some time to give it more the appearance of a Japanese castle, with a peaked red double roof.

Hsien-Ko parked the staff car near the kitchen entrance and led her diminutive passenger over to the door, from which steam scented with cooking spices emerged. A short hallway littered with scraps led to the actual kitchen; Hsien-Ko was gratified to see a small grating set into the wall. She handed a satchel to the uniformed schoolboy, then opened the grating.

'You know where to go.'

He slithered into the vent behind the grating and she sealed it up again before stepping back outside. Two guards were looking at her

car. 'Can I help you?'

The guards looked at each other. She wondered if they were admiring her; Kwok said anyone would. 'Papers.'

Hsien-Ko handed over a sheaf of documents permitting her to be here as an officer's personal geisha. The papers were legitimate, oddly enough, though it had taken many lies to acquire them. The guards were obviously curious about Hsien-Ko's presence, but not overly concerned; many families and camp followers had joined the forces in Manchukuo, especially those from the Kuril islands. The presence of a personal geisha was rare, but not unheard of. 'These look fine,' the guard said finally. 'You're here for lunch?'

'Some men seem to like their home comforts. Also, my son wished to see where I worked when he found out it was with the army. He wants to be a samurai but doesn't realize there aren't such things any longer. I hope he doesn't get lost in such a large kitchen.'

'Don't worry; a boy in school uniform is conspicuous enough not to get lost.'

A young boy in a school uniform would indeed be conspicuous, but also able to hide in smaller nooks and crannies. In this case the ventilator shafts, too narrow for an adult to pass through, provided a fine means of transit throughout the building.

Cold eyes peeked out from under the uniform cap, noting what was going on through each grille he passed. Mostly there were just corridors, though he had walked through a radio room on the floor below and a bathroom on this level. If his calculations were correct, the next vent should be at his destination.

He was right. The next grille looked out onto a drab office covered in maps. A man in shirtsleeves was working at a desk.

He was heavyset with bushy eyebrows. The intruder felt a thrill of anticipation, like a gourmand sitting down in a restaurant. 'Head of Counter-intelligence,' a voice said in his head.

The telephone rang and the man turned his back to answer it. The intruder pushed open the grille swiftly and silently, then slithered out. The man was chattering away about some trivial subject, not hearing the tiny footfalls. He turned round to check some reference and saw the intruder. 'Who are you?'

His voice switched to a strangled gargle as the knife slid up, then twisted, under his breastbone. He made quite a thud when he hit the floor. The voice that was barely audible on the other end of the phone sounded puzzled, then became agitated.

The knife slid through the telephone cable as easily as through flesh and the voice was silenced.

The intruder lifted his school satchel onto the desk and, reaching inside, pulled the metal pin that his fingers found in there. Understanding that there was now a need for urgency, he squeezed back into the air vent and started retracing his route. There was no time to waste replacing the grille so he ignored it in favour of rapid movement.

He reached the vertical shaft down to the next floor and allowed himself to fall down it. Behind him, there was a sharp crack and deep whooshing sound.

Hsien-Ko and the guards glanced up as a pair of third-floor windows blew out in a fireball. Alarm bells started ringing and immediately, the guards looked round for an attacker. One of them pushed Hsien-Ko down behind the car just in case. She tried to resist a tight smile, but was glad that the guard was behind her and couldn't see her face.

Soldiers dashed around frantically while men and women, both civilian and military, poured from the building. 'My baby,' Hsien-Ko wailed, recalling her role. 'What about my baby?' Like so many men, she noted, the two guards were eager to please a woman; they ran back to the kitchen door and disappeared inside.

Two men from a third-floor guard post, fearing for both their careers and their lives, held wet cloths against their faces as they tried to enter the burning office. The flames were far too intense, however, and the occupant of the office was clearly dead. No living man would have been so immobile.

One of them pointed into a barely visible corner of the inferno. 'Look; the air vent! Spread the word.'

Hsien-Ko had been counting silently in her head, trying to match the time between putting the schoolboy into the air vents and the explosion, in order to judge when he would emerge again. She decided to err on the conservative side and went to the kitchen a few seconds early. It was just as well she did; the schoolboy was already emerging.

The two guards emerged from the inner door. 'The cooks say they haven't seen a boy go in here...' They stopped when they realized what they were seeing. 'He's the one in the air vent!' Before they could ready their rifles, Hsien-Ko produced a pistol and shot each unlucky man between the eyes. She felt a stab of pain in her heart, knowing she should have found some other way of covering her tracks. Unfortunately, no such ideas had presented themselves quickly enough.

Not stopping for anything, she pulled the schoolboy fully free from the vent and scooped him up. She wasn't concerned about being stopped: no one would challenge a woman carrying a child from a burning building, even if their presence there was obviously out of place.

She reached the car in a few steps and took a deep breath.

This was the most difficult and dangerous part, but to win everything one had to risk everything; that was something she had learned in a hundred gambling dens over the years.

Holding the schoolboy in one arm, she reached in through the car window as if reaching for the door handle. She started to step forward even as she tugged the pin from the bundle of explosives that was wired under the dashboard just in front of the door.

The car vanished in a billowing flash of fire and shrapnel.

Eleven

Kwok had opened the door to let the Doctor and Li out of the dining-room. The guards followed watchfully. The Doctor rubbed at the side of his nose. 'You know, chronon radiation can produce the oddest side-effects. If you send me away, you might regret it.'

Kwok had expected some sort of last-minute con trick like this. 'Begging doesn't become you.' He showed them out to where a four-door sedan waited on the drive. 'Get in.'

'Well, it's been nice visiting.'

Kwok shoved the Doctor and Li into the back seat of the car, and slapped the roof as a signal to the driver. The car moved off. When it was out of sight, another car drew up before the steps to the house. Kwok knew this was not what Hsien-Ko had intended, but he wanted to ensure her wellbeing as best he could; he did love her, after all. He hoped she would understand. 'Follow them,' he told the guards. He handed the driver a geomantic compass. 'When the Doctor and Li have been stranded in Orkney, kill them.'

Li and the Doctor sat in the back seat of the sedan which carried them into the fading evening light. Li was concerned, since he knew that he was expected at the station and always did what was expected of him. Also, the encounter at the house had not gone as he had expected. They should either have surrendered or fought; this course of action was unexpected.

The unexpected was Li's greatest enemy, as it made him unsure of his place in events. The sooner neatness and order could be extended to everyone, the more comfortable he would feel. The unexpected was dangerous, as one couldn't prepare a response to it. Whether it was a misplaced file or a Tong strategy, the unusual was a definite threat to the pursuit of his job.

How someone as disordered as the Doctor could perform any task was quite beyond him. Not that the Doctor seemed very active right now. He was just staring out of the window.

'Don't we get a commentary?' the Doctor asked suddenly. '"On the left you can see the village where Lao Tze once spent a night"; that sort of thing?'

‘No,’ the driver said shortly.

Li leaned in close to the Doctor. ‘We can escape now.’

‘Not yet. If my guess about what happened to our cars earlier is right, they’ll have to find a particular place to move from, and I want to examine some things about it.’

‘Why?’ Getting out and closing down the Tong was more important, surely.

‘Because then we might be able to work out the sort of places they can go.’

‘I meant why do you think there must be particular places?’

‘The assassins who attacked us at the police station all had individual compasses, so presumably individual people can go anywhere. Something as large as a car is another matter. The truck I was following could have jumped between interstices at any time, so why didn’t it? The only logical assumption is that the driver needed some special conditions. Also, those geomantic compasses they carry bear details on landscape features. I think that’s some sort of *aide-mémoire* for where they can go.’

The car turned and the grey rock of a quarry stretched out below them. The Doctor perked up. ‘A quarry! How very interesting!’ He paused. ‘It looks a lot like Skaro, actually. Or the land outside the Capitol...’

‘That must be where we’re going; there are trucks down there.’

‘Well spotted, inspector.’ The Doctor reached forward with his right hand and tapped the driver on the shoulder. ‘Excuse me, but I was just –’ Li saw his chance, since his left hand had been dragged forward by the cuff anyway, and swung his hand over the Doctor’s. The handcuff chain caught under the driver’s chin, jerking his head back.

The guard in the passenger seat tugged out a gun, but the car was too cramped for him to aim properly. Li forced the gun away with his free hand and head-butted the guard. He then punched the driver a couple of times behind the ear, knocking him unconscious. The car started drifting off the road, but the Doctor thrust out a leg through the gap between the two front seats, catching the steering wheel with the heel of his boot. It looked more like the wheel was moving his foot, but somehow he managed to keep the car on the road.

While the Doctor was propped through the gap between the front seats with his foot on the wheel and one hand on the back of the driver's seat, Li untangled the handcuff chain from around the driver's neck. Squeezing his hand between the driver's seat and the side of the car, he reached the door handle with his fingers and opened it. The driver obediently fell out onto the dusty road, rolling into the darkness behind them.

The Doctor shifted sideways, still propped face-down over the driver's seat, and stretched his other leg down through the gap between the seats towards the pedals. He stabbed at one, and the car juddered to a halt. He knelt on the seat, then turned to sit in it and closed the door.

Li clambered through to the passenger's seat, shoving the guard out of the passenger door. He hadn't thought the Doctor had it in him. Perhaps he was innocent after all; he would still have to go to trial, though. These things had to be done properly, and if he was innocent it would have to be shown in court so that there was no stain on his character. 'Very effective. What now?'

'Now I want to look at that quarry.'

Li glanced up at the rear-view mirror. Two pinpoints of light were moving towards them. 'That might have to wait.'

The Tong had lied about sparing them, he decided. Oddly enough, it was reassuring in a way, in so far as it proved that the proper scheme of things still operated.

The Doctor looked up too. 'Why does nobody ever leave me alone for five minutes, eh?'

* * *

Kwok had finally got round to having some dinner, when he saw the uniformed schoolboy crossing the hallway outside. He never had any doubts that he would return, but where was Hsien-Ko? Leaving the rest of his dinner untouched, Kwok jogged upstairs to their quarters. The room was empty, but the discarded Japanese garb lying on the floor of their quarters told Kwok as much about Hsien-Ko's whereabouts as a note would have.

He fished his locket out from inside his shirt and held it thoughtfully. 'Perhaps she had the right idea.'

A rushing twenty-foot waterfall poured into the largest of a series of

linked pools of crystal-clear water. Trees with huge waxen leaves bordered the secluded lagoon, which was watched over by ancient statues left by some long-forgotten civilization.

Letting the waterfall bombard her was refreshing, but not something that could be endured for too long. Relaxing in the pools warmed by the tropical sun, though, that was another matter. She lay back and drifted, feeling the tension leach out of her and into the water. Next time she wouldn't take such a risk, she decided. It didn't do to tempt fate like that.

'I thought I'd find you here.'

She opened her eyes to see Kwok sitting on a flat rock. She was glad to see him; it was just like old times, and she could almost imagine that Shanghai was as far behind them in terms of obligation as geography. 'I needed this.'

'Did it work?'

'We won't have to worry about Japanese counterintelligence tracking us here; not with their local head cremated along with all his files. Nor can they trace me, now that my tragic geisha has been publicly blown to pieces by a bomb in her car.'

'Then all that remains is to go to the Jade Emperor.'

'Yes.' Suddenly she felt more melancholy than relaxed.

'Once the way is open, our work will be finished. Tomorrow we'll leave Shanghai after I've arranged for cover on duty. We can't have anyone noticing that so many of us have gone.'

Although her profession was somewhat unstable, it was part of what defined her, and the end of any part of her lifestyle was a loss of sorts. She stood, the fine silt seeping around her toes most agreeably, and caught the towel which Kwok threw. 'I suppose that having something isn't always as nice as wanting.' She didn't always feel as certain as she appeared, and this was one of those times.

'When that something is Weng-Chiang, you'd be right.'

'I know, but the bonus is worth having. Travel broadens the mind.'

'And which is more important to you?'

She shook her head. He already knew the answer to that.

‘Let’s go home.’

* * *

Li reached for his gun as the other car approached, but his fingers closed on empty air before he recalled that the guards had confiscated it. He and the Doctor had abandoned the car, and watched from behind a rock as the guards who had followed them examined it.

They seemed to be having some sort of argument with the driver and guard from their car, both of whom had returned to undoubtedly painful consciousness. Such were the wages of sin, Li thought dismissively. The guards split up, combing the scrubby land around.

The Doctor held up his dog whistle and blew on it. ‘Those look like the trucks that left the house,’ he muttered, ‘so K9 should still be around.’ Sure enough, an electrical whirring heralded the arrival of the Doctor’s mechanical pet.

Unfortunately, it also attracted the attention of the guards.

‘Stun them, K9!’

The metallic animal whirled to face the startled guards, and Li blinked as flares of red light sparked between them. The guards fell in rapid succession. Li was astounded. Such a machine would be invaluable to any group in these times.

Perhaps he could sequester it as evidence before the Doctor’s trial...

The Doctor was looking at the edge of the quarry. ‘If those trucks are here for the same reason we were brought here, they must be worth taking a look at.’

‘We go back to the house,’ Li corrected him. ‘Procedure.’

‘You proceed back there, then.’ There was a faint sensation of movement on Li’s left arm, and the cuff dropped from around the Doctor’s wrist. Li looked at the now-empty cuff dangling from his wrist. ‘A trick I learned from Jesse James.’

Li scooped up a gun from a fallen Tong guard. ‘You could have done that at any time, if it was so easy. Why didn’t you?’

‘Because the fact that I was content to remain under arrest when I

didn't have to should help convince you to trust me.'

Li thought about this. A guilty man with such a skill would have escaped long ago, or had K9 shoot him. 'What do you plan to do?'

'Examine those trucks and the geology of the quarry. There must be some reason why vehicles have to come to certain places to jump between interstices, when individual humans don't. At least, those assassins didn't. Remember, the compasses have landscape features listed, so they must correspond to some type of nodes in the Earth's telluric currents. Or you can arrest me again, and by the time you get a force together to return to the house, everyone will be gone.'

Li could have simply shot him or looked for a telephone to round up all the criminals, but something told him that the Doctor knew what he was doing. Trust had a lot to answer for, but the Doctor had indeed earned a measure of trust. Besides, the places that could send a car to its destination instantly were no use without the understanding of how it operated. That must now be the most important prize, he could see. He couldn't let thieves and traitors exploit it alone. 'You'll wait here?'

'Yes.'

'If you're tricking me, I will kill you when we see each other again.'

'People are always saying that to me, you know. It must be a fashion or something.'

* * *

Woo knelt with his eyes closed in a plain and spartan room, trying to be as one with the *kami* – the spirits – all around. The few furnishings in the room included a suit of quilted armour on a mannequin, a straw dummy and a pyramid-shaped stand holding four blade weapons. A *tanto* knife was at the top and longer weapons on the wider lower parts of the stand. The lowermost slot was empty, as he held the scabbarded *katana* from it in his left hand.

He let himself breathe more deeply and slowly, the better to judge the moment at which his spirit would be best able to draw the sword most gracefully. *Iai-do* was a very meditative art, allowing the mind and body to focus on that one perfect moment. Woo practised every day, morning and evening.

There was something very relaxing about it, despite the tensions that maintaining the same position for minutes on end produced. That was

much of the point: to learn the art of patience while awaiting the perfect moment to strike.

That waiting was an art he had long since mastered, but about which he could not afford to become complacent. He had waited so long already for his life's perfect moment to strike, and knew that it was still some few years off. He could make some progress, of course. As Yan Cheh – he wondered whether the anonymous coiner of the phrase for him had known how apposite it was – he could lay the groundwork for what was to come. Making his true stand, though; that would have to wait.

Things were becoming more difficult, however. The Tong of the Black Scorpion were acting outside the parameters he had predicted, while the Doctor and Romana were wild cards.

A dark thought clouded his mind; could they be working for the Sakura Kai?

It was unlikely, but the Society had found him twice since he slipped from their leash in Hong Kong. Neither team had had the chance to report back, but the precedent was there. He dismissed the thought; the Sakura Kai wouldn't trust the *gaijin* enough to send them after him.

He'd been a patriot then, but now the Society called him traitor. Part of him was incensed, but mostly he damped down that feeling. It was a great irony, for he felt that the Sakura Kai were the traitors, not just to the Empire, but to everyone. The name was completely innocuous, and their fears about the Empire's dependence on almost charitable imports were understandable, but their solutions were dangerous.

Woo had seen the spectre of Hachiman reaching out across the Empire in preparation for war even before Marco Polo Bridge and the invasion of Manchuria. Even he, however, hadn't expected the Sakura Kai and the cohorts in the army's Kodo Ha faction to resort to government by assassination.

Then had come last year's revolution. The official line was that it had failed, and that the Tosei Ha faction of the military had kept control, but Woo knew better. So too did the Tosei Ha, who had since altered their policy.

Woo had gone by that time. His family had always been honourable and Woo had been no exception. He had known that the best way to work against this insidious treason in the Empire was to use the skills

and position the traitors had given him against them. First he had had to die, but that had been no problem.

But it takes so many years. Oddly enough, it was true that he had also become distracted by the pleasures of being a good host. Protecting the club had been the convenient reason he had given Romana for his lifestyle, but he had been surprised at just how easily the lies had come. In a way, he knew, it was becoming true. He had to avoid such distractions, he reminded himself. His life had but one purpose.

He still knelt there in the spartan room, hand on hilt. In a flash, it felt as though the *katana's* hilt pushed itself into his hand and flickered through the air like a leaping salmon. There were always pieces of his puzzle to act upon, after all, even though the full thing must wait.

* * *

Li waited amidst the shrubs under the raised patio at the side of Hsien-Ko's house until the two guards on patrol had passed around the corner. Then he leapt up on to the wide patio bordering the french windows. He kept glancing carefully round, though there was little likelihood of anyone approaching the house from this direction. That was why he'd chosen to go in through this side door rather than the main one.

One didn't spend much time in the police force, Li thought, without learning some of the opposition's tricks. He hadn't expected to be using those skills himself, but some things were necessary for the good of all, and so he had no qualms about using a thin-bladed knife to slip the catch on the windows.

Slipping quickly inside, he closed the windows and stepped out of the rectangle of crisp moonlight that framed him. He paused to allow his eyes to adjust to the darkness and could soon make out the strange lines of the edges of furniture, picked out in the moonlight. He started towards the far wall where the door was most likely to be.

Movement dragged Kwok into fuzzy wakefulness, and he shook his head, trying to blink the sleep from his eyes. Once he had adjusted to the light, he noticed that Hsien-Ko was sitting up and looking around, though everything remained dark. He pushed himself up, putting his arms around her shoulders. 'Is something wrong?'

'Someone is in the nursery.' She closed her eyes to concentrate, and Kwok allowed himself to grimace in distaste.

He had no qualms about killing when it was necessary, but the demonic creature which Hsien-Ko had gone to such lengths to recover chilled him to the marrow. It used to belong to Weng-Chiang himself, Kwok knew, and even he had fallen victim to it. He dreaded the day when it might turn on Hsien-Ko, and often wished she would allow him to destroy it before it got the chance.

Hsien-Ko tilted her head as if watching something. 'You can't get out,' she said aloud. 'Step into the light where I can see you.'

Li started sidling towards the french windows, but stopped as a leering little figure with a knife interposed himself between Li and the glass. 'You can't get out,' it gasped in an almost childish voice that had a faint hint of creaking and rotted wood. 'Step into the light where I can see you.'

Li had held his fire for fear that his opponent was a small child, but as he stepped into the rectangle of silver light, Li saw that he was mistaken. The small figure ahead was dressed in a Japanese school uniform; but this was no child; its painted features seemed to mock his confusion with their twisted leer.

In fact, it almost seemed to be an unliving creature; an automaton of grotesquely carved wood, animated by some less scrupulous Taoist necromancer.

He told himself not to be so stupid – obviously it was a midget wearing some sort of tribal mask to frighten the already jumpy opium rats who did the Tong's legwork. He had stepped into the light as instructed, being careful to stay out of range of the midget's knife. He drew his Browning and slipped off the safety, levelling it at the leering dwarf. 'Don't move. You're under arrest.'

Hsien-Ko smiled despite herself as Kwok lifted her unfettered hair free and draped a silken robe around her shoulders. Don't move, indeed; who did the fool think he was dealing with?

'Who is it?' Kwok asked finally, letting her hair fall back over the silk.

'The police inspector who was here earlier.'

'One of Du's lapdogs, without a doubt.'

'Of course. The Great Circle are getting bolder if they think they can walk unheeded into the lair of the Black Scorpion.'

‘You should have let me kill him.’

She considered this. ‘Probably, but there are greater concerns than Du’s desire for a monopoly.’ She closed her eyes with an amused smile, watching Li again, and concentrated on movement.

The dwarf tilted the knife slightly, causing it to flash with reflections as he stepped slowly towards Li. Li was under no illusions as to how deep and deadly a cut the blade could make. He steadied the gun with his free hand and shot the dwarf between the eyes.

Sparks flashed from the surface of the mask, the dwarf reeling backwards under the impact. He straightened again, and continued forward. Telling himself that the mask must be armoured – though he knew there was no such strong armour in the world – Li fired again and again.

This time the bullets scarcely caused a misstep, and the dwarf continued onwards, tiny wisps of smoke rising from the charred patches on its face. Li backed away shakily, feeling the blood drain from him. He kept firing, more sparks and puffs of smoke twitching the thin cloth of the dwarf’s uniform.

In a matter of moments, Li realized that the slide on the gun had jammed back now that it was empty, and the trigger had only clicked when he squeezed it. But the dry clicking sound of an empty gun against an armed opponent wasn’t nearly as unnerving as the throaty and gurgling chuckle that emerged from the dwarf. It sounded like a hungry animal that was delighted to be gorging itself.

Acting on instinct, since his mind was too frightened to operate properly, Li hurled the gun at the dwarf and turned to run. However, Kwok smashed him to the ground with a pistol-butt. Li lay groaning, unable to think of anything but the pain in the side of his head, and felt a faint twinge of *déjà vu* as Hsien-Ko’s bare feet moved past his head. The opium den, he recalled. That dwarf must have been the child he thought he’d seen.

‘All right, Sin; enough,’ she commanded. The inhuman dwarf halted, its beady eyes flashing at the unwanted restraint.

The silk-wrapped beauty smiled demurely, her green eyes almost glowing in the darkness like those of a cat. ‘Like any human child, Sin doesn’t like to be stopped from playing his favourite games. Unfortunately, he only really knows one game.’

Li sat up carefully, aware of the gun aimed at him. He couldn't take his eyes off Sin. He certainly wasn't human. The knife was recognizably the one he had taken from the Doctor and given to Professor Ying for examination. He would deal with Ying later, if there was a later. 'What is that thing?'

'An automaton, if you like, but one that does more than strike a bell every hour on the hour.'

'So I see.' Li turned slightly, and Sin moved to follow him.

He might not be able to kill a machine, and didn't have the time to try to sabotage it, but he could at least get it out of the way. 'I don't think of myself as a bell.' He lashed out at Sin with his foot, catching it in the midriff.

Though unhurt, the dwarf was lifted through the air and slammed into Kwok. Kwok's gun discharged into the ceiling as they tumbled to the floor.

Li flung open the french windows and dashed across the patio. He leapt off the edge as a volley of shots boomed over his head. The safety of the trees beckoned, and then he could return to find out what the Doctor had discovered. He wished he could believe that that was why he was running so fast.

Hsien-Ko lowered her gun once it was empty. The cool night breeze was ruffling her silk wrap as she stepped back in from the french windows. Kwok had scrambled away from Sin and was checking his own gun. He looked at her, trying to hide his loathing of Sin. The dwarf was a product of sorcery, he was certain. 'Now do you believe that we should have killed him and the Doctor?'

'I owed the Doctor, and I still want him on our side. Li is nothing, but you're right; he knows too much. Give the evacuation order; I want the house empty by dawn. Tomorrow I'll sort out everything at the duty stations to cover our absence, then move on to the Jade Emperor. It's not likely that anyone else will be able to second-guess us, but if they do they should be too late to stop the generators running.'

* * *

After spending several minutes tying up the stunned guards, the Doctor and K9 had crept down a narrow scree-strewn path to the floor of the quarry. Four trucks were parked in the dusty central amphitheatre, while a couple of tents were set up near a large

campfire burning a few yards away. Spindly pieces of wood held up pots and kettles over the fire where men were silhouetted sitting around it.

The Doctor scuttled across to the nearest tent. He held the ends of his scarf off the ground so as not to rattle any small rocks. A quick look confirmed that there was no one inside, so he quickly ducked through the flap.

Now he could make out the voices of the men sitting around the fire. 'At least we won't have to do this again,' one of them was saying.

'No. Once we're finished at the Jade Emperor temple and Weng-Chiang has returned...'

'It hardly seems true, does it? I still have fears that Hsien-Ko is wrong and nothing will happen.'

'She may only be a woman, but she has done what she said. She gave us the Dragon Path; she will renew Weng-Chiang.'

'I saw the omens at the sacrifice, it's true. The smoke took the form of the eyes of the dragon.'

K9 could sense the Doctor's life signs altering to a more tense mode. 'Renew Weng-Chiang?' He crawled out of the back of the tent as they moved towards the trucks. The Doctor knelt to examine a piece of rock from the floor of the quarry.

He sniffed at it, then held it to his ear before holding it out to K9. 'What can you tell me about this? Quietly?'

'Mica-bearing rock. Magnetites, silicates and trace elements of ferric salts all show disruption caused by exposure to chronon radiation. Suggest displacement as cause.'

'Hmm. Like the splash created by a diver when he enters the water.'

'Affirmative, master.' K9 could tell that his information had been understood, and that was a reflection of high efficiency. He wouldn't stoop to using a word like 'pleasing' though it proved that his function as a computer was being adequately fulfilled. The Doctor replaced the rock on the ground and tiptoed over to the nearest truck. Making sure no one was in it, he lifted K9 up and scrambled on board. The truck was full of squared-off piles of crates covered with tarpaulins.

There was a knock behind him. The Doctor flattened himself against the side of the truck, affording K9 a clear shot at the newcomer. K9 held his fire, however; it was Li, whose heat trace and heart rate were visibly increased.

The Doctor lifted one of the tarpaulins carefully and directed the light from a pen torch onto the crate underneath. 'Imperial Army Air Fleet, Kanamaruhara...These are Japanese military explosives.' K9's linguistic bank confirmed that the Doctor was right.

Li peered at the stylized characters painted onto the wood.

'Stolen from forward bases in Manchuria?'

'Not necessarily; until we know what causes the Dragon Paths, we can't be sure what sort of a range they're spread over.'

'You mean they could be from mainland Japan? That's impossible.'

'So should a journey from London to here be. If a journey along the Dragon Path is at a speed as close to the speed of light as makes no difference, he could have travelled that distance in the blink of an eye. Just like we did from the countryside to near the Bund.'

There was a flurry of activity from outside. All three of them looked out: a car had arrived in the quarry, Kwok waving the men from the fireside to the trucks. The Doctor looked at Li. 'I take it things didn't go well?'

'You could put it that way.'

The truck shook as its engine started up, and the Doctor and Li had to grab hold of crates to keep their balance. 'They're leaving!' The Doctor grabbed K9 and dropped him off the back of the truck. He followed, then rolled up to catch Li.

The truck had already gone, however, and the growl of its engine echoed into silence. Around him, the remaining vehicles were hurtling straight towards the rocky sides of the quarry. Flickering blue ripples burst from the front of each truck, and they disappeared one by one until the Doctor was forced to dodge the last truck as it went past. His eyes widened as he saw what was amidst the crates in the back of the final vanishing truck.

There could hardly have been two police boxes in Shanghai...

Twelve

The Club Do-San was rather busier now that night had fallen. Woo felt a surge of pride at the sight of so many people chatting and laughing together in his establishment. He had never expected that the trade which had been picked for him by his former masters would be so satisfying, but there was something addictive about persuading people to happily forget their cares for a while.

He moved across the dance floor, trying not to cough on the tobacco smoke that filled the air. The smoke reminded him uncomfortably of the fate of his original club which had burned to the ground several years ago. He had almost died there, having set the charges with too short a fuse. As far as his ex-employers were concerned he had died there. He even had the death certificate to prove it, though the name on it wasn't Woo. It hadn't been a place like this, of course. This had taken real care to build up, unlike the old sleazepit.

He liked to tour the club once or twice a night, to see if anyone he knew was in. He didn't recognize anyone tonight, though it was still early. Now he had a second opinion to seek – whether Romana would recognize anyone here. He mixed himself a Manhattan behind the bar while waiting for her debut. He also smiled and made eyes at the barmaids – that was expected of him, and playing on expectations was what made his job possible. At least it was a pleasurable duty.

The band struck up a fanfare to announce the imminent emergence of the evening's singer. Romana – who had been billed as Romy, direct from Broadway – emerged from an arch at the centre of the bandstand. Woo could see the uncertainty in her eyes, but had to admit that her affected haughtiness covered it well enough to hide it from the audience. She launched into 'Wonderful World', which she had told him was by Louis Armstrong, though he had never heard of it. Perhaps launched was the wrong word; she enunciated each word clearly and delicately, but it seemed to work with this song.

The patrons didn't seem to be enraptured, but they weren't throwing bottles at her either, so he supposed she was doing all right. He watched her for several long moments, not really listening to the song, and could feel his heart beating faster.

He wondered what her skin would feel like under his palms, her mouth on his...Stop that, he told himself. He forced himself to move

his eyes across the tables. This was business, and in any case, Wei Pei would be upset. He smiled at the thought that it might be worth it.

* * *

As Professor Ying of Shanghai's police laboratory was shaken awake, he reached instinctively for the gun on his bedside table. He stopped when he saw that it was Kwok, standing by the bed. 'I wish you would use the doorbell like anyone else.'

Kwok, who never seemed sociable, ignored him. 'Get dressed. We're moving to the Jade Emperor immediately.'

Ying was alert at once. 'What's happened?'

'Your friend from work has blown our cover. Hsien-Ko is preparing to co-ordinate the main workforce's movement tomorrow, but she wants the heat exchanger and turbine prepared by the time she arrives. You've got ten minutes.'

With that, Kwok stepped back into the darkness. Although the door and windows never opened, Ying knew that he was no longer in the building, let alone the room.

* * *

Woo settled into the chair in his office and selected a table number at random from the switchboard. The voices of two Americans came over the speaker, arguing over a girl. He tried a different number, only to find that it belonged to someone complaining about having to fetch their own drinks.

Woo groaned inwardly; the waiter for this shift must have slipped away early, and it was the way of things in China that staff who worked in one section couldn't work in another. If Woo tried to send a waiter from the floorside area up to the balcony, the boss coolie would cause trouble. He switched to another table.

'... is going on. The whole brigade is being mobilized first thing,' someone was saying.

'When did those orders come in? We haven't heard anything.'

'I don't know. All I do know is that I'm the one stuck with finding someone to replace the Fourteenth Engineers from tomorrow night.'

‘The campaign against the Communists is probably bogged down in the mountains again.’

‘Probably. If we were coolies we could just let them stew. I don’t much like Kwok’s attitude either.’ Woo sat bolt upright.

‘It borders on insubordination.’

‘Haven’t you had confirmation from his commander?’

‘Haven’t been able to get through. There’s something very odd going on there. To be honest, I begin to wonder whether his commander even knows what is going on.’ Woo wondered as well. Kwok was a common name, but the anomalous behaviour suggested that this was no coincidence.

‘Now you’re seeing shadows. It’s just Logistics getting things wrong as usual. Now cheer up, we’re here to enjoy ourselves.’

‘Hmm. I could enjoy myself with this Romy.’ Both voices degenerated into lascivious laughter. Woo was disgusted, mostly because he felt the same way.

Woo picked up the phone. ‘Rondo, it’s me. Check the files and get back to me on where the Fourteenth Engineering Brigade is based.’ If there was a connection to Black Scorpion, then a visit from Yan Cheh would definitely be a good idea.

He replaced the phone, glad that the evening hadn’t been a total loss.

Woo could hear polite applause over the speakers. Such politeness was one of the things that was as prevalent here in Shanghai as at home. Romana came into the office a few minutes later, looking weary. He felt guilty at having put her out there; she had demonstrated great intellect, of course, but she did somehow seem quite innocent in a way. He supposed it was like a traveller who had learned all about the city from books, then tried to act like a native – except that she wasn’t that annoying. No, he decided, it was more an air of having been sheltered. ‘Well?’

She took a deep breath. ‘I didn’t see anyone out there who was at the docks or the police station. Did you have any luck?’

‘Perhaps. It may be unconnected, but –’

Romana nodded, cutting him off. ‘It seems obvious that waiting for

information to fall into our lap isn't going to work.' She straightened, pacing around slightly. Woo was surprised; it was as if she was trying to take charge. 'First we'll have to find the Doctor.'

'First you'd best get some rest and something to eat,' Woo corrected. 'We'll see about looking for your friend afterwards.'

* * *

The world had twisted in some strange way, then returned to normal. It wasn't something that Li could quantify, but more a sensation in his stomach, as if he had spun through the air while firmly attached to the ground. It had been a far stronger sensation than when he had followed the Doctor's car, but was a distinctly similar phenomenon.

Li was faintly glad of that. At least whatever it was had been categorizable. That meant he could compare it to other events efficiently. It wasn't much, but it was a start. He peered out from beneath the tarpaulin and saw a few more trucks following.

A large double-roofed arch was shrinking into the distance behind the trucks, and rural buildings were crowding around it in a street. Li didn't recognize the arch at all. He was pretty sure he knew most of Shanghai, but this part was definitely unfamiliar. Fastidious to the last, he dutifully started noting down brief local features in a small notepad. They might come in useful later.

The truck then turned left, and Li saw that they were entering some sort of walled compound through a large double gate. The truck ground to a halt in the middle of a moonlit courtyard. The other trucks swerved to park alongside and Li scrambled towards the back of the truck, knowing that someone would be coming to unload it.

He was right. Before he even set foot on the ground, two men had arrived to open the tailgate. They stared at him in mute surprise. He quickly launched a flurry of blows at them, then jumped down to make a run for the gates. Twice in one night, he thought, recognizing the irony of a policeman being a fugitive.

He had almost reached the gate when another truck rumbled through. Blinded by the headlights, he flung himself to one side as it passed. By the time the glare had passed and he could pick himself up, several armed guards had surrounded him.

One of them, shrugged. 'Kill him.'

'No!' a familiar voice snapped. Li turned to see the mustachioed Professor Ying jogging across the courtyard towards them. Li was more hurt than angry at first. The idea of a police officer associating with these bandits was sickening.

He didn't think it was hypocritical to feel that way while he himself was a member of the Great Circle Tong, since the Great Circle at least had some semiofficial approval.

Doubtless Ying had made up all that nonsense about the knife not being the murder weapon. Li's anger swelled, bubbling up through the surprise. He would throw the book at Ying for this twisted double-life he had led.

Ying smiled, as if reading his mind. 'If the Doctor is also still free, but outside Hsien-Ko's control, we may need a hostage.'

* * *

Romana and Woo had eaten in Woo's private dining-room, with Rondo as their waiter. He had also delivered the file which Woo had asked for. Woo was quite at ease; of the various girls he had entertained here, Romy was by far the most fascinating. It was that mixture of intelligence and innocence that interested him.

'I suggest you remain here,' Woo was saying, 'while I pay this engineering brigade a visit. If they have been infiltrated by the Black Scorpion -' There was a faint shuffling sound behind the door and Woo saw the handle begin to turn.

Since Rondo hadn't preceded whoever it was - and they hadn't knocked - Woo doubted it was anyone friendly. He grabbed a champagne bottle from the rack and slipped behind the door as it started to open. Romana look up in surprise as a tall man with curly hair and an unseasonal overcoat and woollen scarf breezed in. Woo raised the champagne bottle, ready for a surprise overhand swing. 'Aha,' the newcomer exclaimed. 'Of all the gin joints in all the world, I thought I'd find you here.' He suddenly stretched an accusatory finger backwards towards Woo, without looking round. 'If that's a '29, you were expecting me.'

'It's all right,' Romana told Woo. 'This is the friend I told you about; the Doctor.'

'Yes, I recognize the scarf. Pleased to meet you, Doctor.'

Romy has been telling me all about you.’ Slightly distracted by wondering what had given away his position, Woo looked the Doctor up and down, taking in the bizarre clothing and rather theatrically eccentric wide-eyed look. This was unmistakably the man from the docks, whom he had followed to the police box on Waibaidu bridge, but at close range he didn’t look much like a policeman to Woo – not even an undercover one. K9 followed the Doctor in.

The Doctor looked at Romana with a wicked grin. ‘Romy?’

‘It’s my stage name,’ Romana said haughtily.

‘Well, it could be worse.’ He turned to Woo. ‘You must be Yan Cheh.’

‘Yes.’ Woo felt inexplicably embarrassed.

‘Let me guess – You’re going to tell me you know what evil lurks in the hearts of men?’

‘I leave that to Orson Welles. His serial is...amusing.’

‘Yes.’ The Doctor looked around at the expensive furnishings. ‘Ah; billionaire playboy by day, licensed to kill costumed vigilante by night?’

‘I’m not a billionaire, my reasons for what I do are not simple as mere vigilantism, and I don’t wear a costume. Apart from that, I don’t see the problem.’

The Doctor gave him a reproachful look. ‘Well, it’s not totally original is it?’

Woo smiled tightly. ‘And the more-than-human eccentric expert in everything is? I’ve read Robeson’s pulp adventures too.’

‘Never met him. I don’t suppose you two have discovered anything useful?’

‘The members of one KMT brigade are packing to move, though they haven’t had any official orders,’ Romana said. ‘It could be a coincidence –’

‘No. The Black Scorpion will be moving out tonight, now that their security has been compromised.’

‘You got in?’ Woo asked, intrigued.

‘I had a nice chat with a young lady called Hsien-Ko, who seems to run the Black Scorpion now.’ He looked towards Romana. ‘She seems to know who we are, but I’m sure we’ve never met. Not yet, anyway.’

Romana perked up. ‘Then she must have been told.’

‘Yes.’

‘But by whom?’ She frowned uncertainly. ‘You don’t think...’

‘The White Guardian warned us to beware.’ The Doctor paced around the table. ‘These chronon discharges could be a deliberate trap to lure us off course.’

This had totally lost Woo. This pair might be friends of the Fallen Angel, but it didn’t sound like they were working on quite the same problem as himself. The idea that they had been led off course in some way, however, implied that they weren’t even meant to be here at all. ‘Just a minute; I thought you two were friends of the Fallen Angel.’

‘Who?’ Romana asked.

The Doctor snapped his fingers. ‘Lucas Seyton! I haven’t seen him for three hundred years, which would make it about four years ago.’

‘What?’ Woo demanded. ‘You’ve been taking opiates or –’

‘What brigade?’ interrupted the Doctor.

Woo was taken aback, his mind trying to juggle the questions that were struggling up through it from his subconscious. ‘I don’t –’

‘What brigade are packing? If they are somehow connected with the Black Scorpion, we might be able to turn them in, or at least find out where they’re going and why.’

‘The Fourteenth Engineers.’

‘Engineers? Why engineers? If they’re going to be terrorists or rebels – or even if they’re just going to continue smuggling – then why not infiltrate the infantry? What do they need a brigade of engineers for?’

‘I’ve no idea.’ Woo recovered quickly, ashamed at the way he had allowed himself to be sidetracked by mere small talk. Business was business, and that had to be dealt with first. ‘It might not even be connected.’

The Doctor made a face at that idea. ‘I’ll bet you a pound to a bucket of ferrets that it is. Right; first thing in the morning, we’ll go and ask.’

‘Ask? What are you going to do, walk up to the front door and ask them to let you in?’

‘Why not? Right; we’ll make a two-pronged approach. Romy – Romana – and I will ask to see the senior officer. If he really doesn’t know what’s going on, we might be able to shut them down. While we’re keeping them busy, you can take a look around.’

‘And if the senior officer is involved?’

‘Oh, then you rescue Romana and I rescue you – or vice versa. That’s how it usually works.’

Thirteen

As with the previous morning, a mist had drifted inland along the Huangpu. Its insubstantial greyness clung to the surface of the river despite the summery climate. The sounds of boots on wood thudded from shore to shore as the Doctor and Romana strolled across the many pontoons that linked the moored junks together with a larger vessel in the middle of the river.

It was a junk of sorts, thin wisps of smoke emerging from vents below decks. It was dominated by a huge sterncastle and three tall masts, while the gun mountings and radio antennae that sprouted from the afterdeck were clearly much more modern additions.

Woo glanced at the small motor boat which Rondo had left in the lee of a distant jetty during the night. From here it was safely cloaked by the mist, but Woo knew that K9 was hidden away in the back seat. He just hoped nobody stole the boat.

He had to take care to be quiet as he hauled himself up the ship's anchor-chain, since sounds were amplified by fog. The climb wasn't easy in his leather trenchcoat with double shoulder-holsters, but practice made it quick enough. Once crouching on the deck behind the capstan, Woo smoothed his mop of hair to keep it out of his eyes, and stuck another toothpick in the corner of his mouth.

A uniformed soldier with a rifle was just visible leaning on the rail opposite, but Woo was all too aware that shooting him or tossing him overboard would make too much noise and alert everyone on board. Not for the first time, he wished he could cloud men's minds as the Shadow did. As it was, he would have to hope that the mist would do his clouding for him.

The Doctor and Romana walked quickly, the latter having to hurry a bit to keep up. 'You know, this might be a little hasty,'

Romana warned. 'We've no reason to assume they won't just shoot us.'

'The Kuomintang is the government here, so they'll have to maintain at least some semblance of open government to look respectable. Besides, I don't think Hsien-Ko's that keen on killing, which makes a nice change. I wish I could say the same about her man.'

'Typical male?' she asked archly.

'I don't know. Anyway, after Xanxia, then Vivien Fay...It must be something to do with political correctness.'

'Political correctness?'

'Hmm. It's a general feeling that discrimination is all right so long as it's done by groups who were discriminated against earlier.'

'I see; tit for tat. Very childish.' Somehow she would have thought that civilization would need a more sophisticated set of inter-relationships. That was what the textbooks suggested, anyway.

'That's humans for you.'

'I really don't see why you like them so much. I mean, they're barely civilized.'

'Ideal of the noble savage?' They had reached the gangway up to the midships of the three-masted junk by now. A pair of guards stood by the base of the steps, fingering their guns. The Doctor went straight up to them with a friendly grin. 'Hello there; I'm the Doctor, and this is Romana. We were just wondering if we could see your commanding officer?'

'About what?'

'A personnel matter.'

The nearest guard frowned suspiciously, then shrugged.

'Go and see if the colonel's available to see visitors,' he told his compatriot. The other guard hurried up the gangway and disappeared below decks.

'Told you so,' the Doctor said proudly to Romana.

She lifted an eyebrow coolly. 'That sort of brinkmanship doesn't become a Time Lord, you know.'

'Then why do you bother to respond to it? It's like all those people who write into the papers to complain about publicity being given to something they don't like – it just adds to it.'

'That isn't a very logical argument.'

'The cosmos isn't a very logical place. That's probably why all those stuffed shirts in the Capitol are content to hide from it.'

As someone who much preferred the safety and security of home to all this wandering around hostile planets, Romana didn't think that hiding was much of a problem. 'They don't hide from it; they just have a more rational and reasonable way of going about things.'

'Rational and reasonable? There's no one so quick to go crazy as a perfectly sane man.'

'Well, I'm glad you're safe. Oh, he's coming back.'

The guard was indeed returning, with an adjutant in a junior officer's uniform. The adjutant looked over the new arrivals.

'Are they armed?'

'I never carry weapons,' the Doctor announced.

Romana suddenly felt very guilty, recalling the weight at the small of her back. She removed the Walther PP Woo had given her and handed it over with a sheepish smile. 'Just this, sorry.'

'We'll see.' The adjutant nodded to the guards, who patted the visitors down, searching for weapons. They both shook their heads. 'All right, the colonel will see you. Follow me.'

He led the way up the gangway, and the Doctor and Romana followed. A blushing Romana contrived to drive her heel into the arch of the guard who had searched her. Humans were such an animalistic species.

The adjutant led them on deck, then down into the upswept sterncastle, where a short corridor led to a panelled door. The adjutant knocked and pushed the door open. Inside, the walls were half panelled and half papered in blue. A gold lamp hung from the ceiling and a wide office desk was squatting in the middle of the stateroom. A small bunk was off to one side, while a couple of chairs were on the nearside of the desk. A larger, more padded chair was turned away from them, to face the wide window port set into the aft wall. 'Colonel,' the adjutant said respectfully, 'these civilians wish to speak with you on a matter of some importance.'

There was no response from the chair, so the Doctor settled his scarf more comfortably, like a Roman orator adjusting his toga before speaking, and cleared his throat loudly. 'Well, I just thought that you'd like to know that some of your people are a bit less patriotic than you might like.'

The chair swung round slowly, Hsien-Ko's ruby lips smiling demurely. She now wore a KMT officer's uniform, but the eyes and simple ponytail were unmistakable. 'So I'd heard. Is this the girl Leela with you?' She gestured towards Romana.

The Doctor stepped backwards, but the adjutant was already closing the door, his gun drawn. The Doctor's eyes tilted ceilingwards in a sorrowful puppy expression. 'No, this is Romana. I was wondering when we'd met before; that narrows it down a bit.'

Hsien-Ko motioned for them to sit, and steepled her fingers thoughtfully. 'You and Leela are acquaintances of my family. As I said, my family owes you a debt.'

'Yes, I remember... What for, may I ask?'

'For your part in my father's death.'

'Who was this father of yours? I haven't been in China for centuries.'

She paused, watching him carefully. 'You knew him in London, where he was performing in 1889. I believe they called him the Master of Magic and Mesmerism.'

'Li H'sen Chang,' the Doctor breathed. 'But he died nearly fifty years ago; you can't be more than half that age.'

'I'm young for my age,' Hsien-Ko said with a pleasant smile.

The Doctor frowned rather theatrically, before grinning slyly. 'Don't you mean you look young for your age? I mean, I don't want to seem too pedantic, but –'

'I know what I mean. I am sixty-five, after all.'

* * *

Reassuring himself that the soldier was looking out across the river, Woo scuttled across to the nearest doorway in the long deckhouse between the masts. A narrow companionway led down into a dark wooden corridor, and Woo started down the almost vertical stairway.

He had only gone down a couple of steps when he heard the thud of heavy footfalls from below. He leapt back up to the door and scrambled onto the deckhouse roof. As the footsteps continued, Woo began to wonder if a statue was coming up from below decks, so

heavy were the treads. After a few moments, two figures wrapped entirely in thick one-piece suits emerged, their heads covered by hoods of the same material.

They – Woo was unable to tell whether they were men or women under all that – wore heavy boots like Boris Karloff's hand-me-downs, and heavily padded gloves.

Together, the suited figures carried a stout metal box out of the companionway and round the side of the deckhouse.

Keeping flat against the roof, Woo slithered along to keep watch as they carried their load along the side of the ship.

A few yards ahead of them, a gangway led down to the deck of a smaller motor launch. Woo recognized it immediately as the vessel that had brought and then removed Hsien-Ko to and from Gongpinglu Wharf.

Woo wondered what was in the box. It must be valuable to them, of course, and it looked heavy enough to contain gold, but why did they wear those thick suits? He watched with interest as the pair lowered the casket into a larger metal sarcophagus set into the deck of the launch. Once they had sealed the casket inside this container, they straightened and removed their hoods. They were two ordinary coolies underneath, with sweat-plastered hair, who relievedly gulped in the cool damp air.

Fanning themselves with their unattached hoods, the two men returned to the ship. 'At least we won't have to wear these damn things any more,' one of them grumbled.

The other nodded. 'Leave it to the Jade Emperor, and Weng-Chiang.'

'With pleasure. At least they'll have it cooler up there.'

'Not with Weng-Chiang around.'

'That's true. My grandfather met him once.'

'Weng-Chiang? What did he say about him?' The voice sounded interested, and eager.

'He said he was dangerous.'

There was a pause. 'That's it?' The voice was incredulous.

‘What else do you need?’

‘Your grandfather met a god, and that’s all he said? It couldn’t be such an unmemorable occurrence.’

‘He wasn’t interviewing him for the radio! What were you expecting?’

‘I don’t know. I never really thought about what you’d ask someone who met a god. It’s not an everyday happening.’

‘No? You said you met the Dog General just the other night.’

‘That’s different; that’s just a spirit, not a god. All I’m saying is that you’d think he would have said something about whether Weng-Chiang breathed poison and gazed with beams of light like the stories say. I mean, that’s not something you could miss, is it?’

‘Well, since all the stories say that, maybe he just assumed we’d already know that part, and didn’t want to waste his breath on something we already knew. Unless you’re trying to tell me you have doubts?’

The other man’s indignant reply was lost as they clumped back down the companionway into the darkness under the deckhouse. Woo considered following them, but decided against it. Instead, he would follow the Doctor and Romy to keep an eye on her – them.

They would be on board by now, if the Doctor had been right. Woo hadn’t heard any shooting, so it seemed reasonable to assume that he had been right. Woo didn’t know where on the ship they were, of course, but he knew who they were going to ask for. All he had to do was ask the same question.

The guard who had been leaning boredly on the rail was now strolling along the deck amidships, presumably on his regular beat.

That meant he would pass under the eaves of the main deckhouse. Woo waited until the guard was directly below, then reached down. He grabbed the back of the man’s collar at the same time as punching him behind the ear. The guard slumped a little, unconscious, but was still held up by Woo’s hand. Grabbing his collar with the other hand as well, Woo heaved the guard up onto the roof of the deckhouse. He quickly tied the guard’s wrists and ankles and shook him awake.

The guard drew in a breath, but Woo clamped a hand over his mouth before he could call out. He tut-tutted. ‘That’s no way to greet a

visitor,' he whispered. You just didn't get the same quality of thugs these days, he reflected. 'Where is the senior officer's stateroom?'

He shifted his hand to the guard's throat, squeezing just hard enough to let him breathe enough to talk in a croak. 'The colonel?'

'That's right.'

'At the stern – inside the sterncastle and the first deck down. It's at the end of the corridor, so you can't miss it.' The guard's face was turning an unhealthy blue tinge.

Woo pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and gagged the man with it. 'Thanks for your help.'

Woo left the guard on the roof, then dropped silently to the wooden deck. Pausing only to dodge behind a ventilator pipe when two men went past, Woo padded to the shelter deck in seconds. A small knot of men were busy with ropes for the sails on the sterncastle above, but they were all too engrossed in their work to notice him.

He ducked inside a bulkhead door and found himself in a vestibule with two doors and a stairwell. Hoping that the guard hadn't lied to him – and imagining what he would do if he had – Woo went down the steps. There, he found himself in a short wood-panelled corridor that turned left two doors down. He peeked round the corner and saw that there was indeed a door at the end. A guard stood outside.

Shooting would alert any hostiles inside the room, so that was out of the question, but he still had to get that guard out of the way, and quietly. He stuck a hand round the corner, tapped gently on the wall, then made a come-hither motion.

He heard hesitant footsteps almost immediately, listening closely to judge their distance. The guard's shadow stretched out past the corner, giving another means to work out how far away he was. Woo counted down until he was reasonably certain the guard was precisely one step away from the corner, then delivered a head-high kick as the man took that last step.

The guard walked straight into Woo's boot, and fell, poleaxed. Woo stepped over the body, then moved down to the end of the corridor to press his ear against the wooden door. 'An honourable age,' the Doctor's rich tones were saying. 'You seem to be keeping in shape – that's very important for the health of the elderly.' Evidently this colonel must be quite old. Good, Woo, thought, that meant he

wouldn't be much of a danger.

Satisfied that the Doctor had everything in hand, Woo opened the door and stepped in. 'Sorry I'm late but –' Then he noticed who was sitting behind the desk. A gun was in Woo's hand instantly, swinging into a firing stance. The Doctor clamped a hand over it with a grimace an instant before a cold muzzle was pressed to Woo's temple from behind the door.

The Doctor then looked back at Hsien-Ko.

'That was a very fast draw,' she acknowledged in an admiring tone, which Woo was too stunned to feel flattered by. 'You can only be this Yan Cheh I've heard so much about. Do come in.'

Woo closed the door, the adjutant who had been behind it confiscating his Colts. Hsien-Ko narrowed her eyes, looking him over. He felt uncomfortably like a snake faced by a mongoose, but was glad that Romy was unharmed. And the Doctor, of course. Not that Hsien-Ko wasn't equally enticing.

'I know you,' Hsien-Ko muttered. 'You're Woo! The owner of the Club Do-San.' Her face broke into a grin of satisfaction; obviously she was putting the pieces together.

'That's how you could track our movements – any time Kwok or I have been there, either the waiters were eavesdropping or the tables were bugged. Correct me if I'm wrong.'

'I've never heard of this Yan Cheh,' Woo said stiffly. It was the only thing he could think of; to brazen it out.

Hsien-Ko shook her head. 'As you see Doctor, I've kept my faculties as well as my figure over six decades.'

The Doctor tilted his head. 'You are human, aren't you?'

Woo looked at him as if he were mad.

'Yes.' She smiled coyly.

The Doctor smiled slowly. 'Well, if you don't mind my saying so, you seem to take that question rather in your stride.'

Hsien-Ko's expression didn't change. 'I believe it's called being inscrutable. The *gwai lo* seem to like that.'

‘Ah, face. Well, I’m willing to have any delusion shattered.’

‘Of course; you are not western, are you, Doctor?’ She shook her head as Woo wondered what she and the Doctor were talking about. It seemed as if they were talking at cross-purposes, but something about their tones told Woo that this wasn’t the case.

The Doctor snapped his fingers, as if inspiration had struck.

‘Ah, I see. You blame me for your father’s death, and you want revenge?’

Hsien-Ko gave an amused shake of the head, though ice glittered in her eyes. ‘I don’t practice rhetoric, Doctor; if I blamed you for my father’s death, we wouldn’t be talking right now.’ She half-closed her eyes. ‘The survivors of the Tong told me what happened, and I gained other information on the subject from the police and newspapers. My father had been greatly shamed, but your intercession allowed him to retain face in death.’

‘Then why are you throwing it all away by following his original path?’

‘Is that what you think? This is not throwing anything away. My father’s honour will be maintained, and enhanced, when my work is complete. You will approve when it’s all over, Doctor, believe me. As it is, I am rather busy at the moment, so our discussion will have to wait.’ She turned to the adjutant. ‘Escort our guests to the brig.’

* * *

K9 didn’t like being so close to water. Electricity and liquids just didn’t mix well. Machines could not, by definition, become bored, but K9 would have had to admit, if asked, that one could only analyse the particle constituents of the same river a few times before it ceased to be an efficient act.

It had proved useful, though, as the water was displaying a surprisingly high level of charged particle decay. It wasn’t enough to be dangerous, but the information was worth filing away in his data banks.

The other thing which had occupied his time was calculating what stage the Doctor’s plan would have reached.

According to K9’s internal chronometer, and cross-referencing with

past data, the Doctor and Romana would be locked up by now, and would doubtless soon call for his assistance.

With that in mind, he set about analysing the electrical system of the speedboat he was sitting in, and calculating how he would best be able to operate it, bearing in mind that he had no limbs, and it had no computer to access.

* * *

The brig was a small and grimy cabin that hadn't been used for years, going by the dust. The Doctor was lying on a bunk, humming 'Nobody knows the trouble I've seen', while Woo tested the door and porthole with his bare hands. He was wondering if he could open either of them. So far, he had had little luck. Romana sat thinking. 'Terrestrial anthropology isn't really my field, but that girl can't be more than what, twenty-five?'

The Doctor paused from his humming. 'Unless there's a temporal instability involved.'

'I don't think anyone's ever made a study of the effects of massive chronon irradiation on the humanoid body...I suppose it's possible that a massive dose at the embryonic stage could produce some sort of mutation; so why not antegeria?'

'Antegeria?' Woo asked. All of this was beyond him, and he was beginning to wonder if he was hallucinating – due to ergot poisoning from tainted rice, perhaps.

'Lack of ageing,' the Doctor explained. 'The opposite of progeria, or Hutchinson-Gilford's Syndrome. Sufferers age to death before they reach puberty because their metabolic rate has been vastly accelerated. In this case, the opposite occurs: Hsien-Ko just doesn't age.'

'You mean her metabolic rate has slowed a great deal?'

'Not exactly, if that had happened she'd be hibernating. It must have some connection to the chronon radiation we've been tracking; she's absolutely riddled with it and can somehow exploit telluric current. How old did she say she was?'

'Sixty-five. She doesn't look a day older than Romy here.'

Romana winced at the nickname. 'Actually, by Earth years I'm a

hundred and –’

‘Shh!’ The Doctor put a finger to his lips. ‘That places her date of birth in 1872. That rings a bell...’ He mumbled incoherently to himself for a moment. ‘What was it? “We came home in ‘73...It’s been in the family quite some time!” Of course! The Time Cabinet!’ He slapped himself on the forehead.

‘What?’ Romana looked baffled for once.

‘The zygma beam; Magnus Greel’s zygma beam!’ The Doctor looked very harried all of a sudden, and Woo didn’t like that idea at all; if the Doctor went mad, he’d have a hard time getting them out of this. ‘T’ung Chi gave it to the widow of Brigadier-General Litefoot when they left Peking in 1873. Before that, it had been seized by T’ung Chi’s army after arriving from the fifty-first century. Greel’s technology was based on Findecker’s Folly, d’you see? The double-nexus particle. It used a zygma beam to push the cabinet back through time...’

Her eyes brightening, Romana nodded eagerly. ‘As the beam intersects with the Earth’s electromagnetic field, it reacts with it to produce massive discharges of chronon radiation. Its spatial area of influence must be in direct proportion to the length of the zygma beam; a tiny localized disruption at source, and a wider discharge at the destination, since the beam has lost coherence with distance.’

‘Ah. That’s a much better idea than I had.’ The Doctor’s expression hardened. ‘Yes. That time shift is discharging chronon energy into the Earth’s geomagnetic field, making the natural telluric currents powerful enough to carry travellers.’

‘If they’ve got a chronon source in phase with the current.

Such as a sample of Hsien-Ko’s cellular structure. The blood samples set into those geomantic compasses, perhaps.

Presumably Hsien-Ko herself doesn’t need one.’

The Doctor grinned proudly. ‘Well, that’s a bit basic, but very well put, Romana.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Very clever indeed,’ Hsien-Ko added from outside the brig. ‘The energy radiations from Weng-Chiang’s Time Cabinet left many side-effects upon its arrival while I was in the womb. My immortality is

only one of them.’ The door opened with a rattle of keys, and Mister Sin waddled into the brig, still in his now rather stained Japanese school uniform. Woo nodded to himself. Obviously this was the dwarf he’d seen at the docks. He wondered why it wore that grotesque wooden mask, and then felt his blood cool and slow.

It wasn’t a mask, he saw, and its joints swung without any movement of muscles under the sleeves and trouserlegs.

Instead it was stiff and mechanical, like a poseable mannequin being moved by invisible hands.

The Doctor’s eyes widened, then narrowed in a surprisingly chilling look. ‘What is that doing here? Is that what you went to the music hall museum for?’

‘Oh, don’t mind him; I just don’t want you trying anything foolish. But yes, this is why I went to the museum in London. Sin is a very useful tool.’

‘Sometimes so is sweaty nitroglycerine, but letting that thing run loose is like juggling the stuff. I thought I’d deactivated it.’

‘There was a spare circuit – the prototype. The pig’s brain matter had decayed, but there’s a fairly infinite supply of that from the local restaurants.’

‘I don’t think much of its outfit.’

Hsien-Ko laughed. ‘A society girl with a ventriloquist’s doll would be commented upon. With a child, though...Who would stop a child? We’re wasting time, however, and what I want is for Romana to join me out here.’

‘What are you going to do with her?’ the Doctor growled.

Woo tensed himself to spring, rather than waste time talking.

‘How many times must I tell you? I have no wish to harm you. I want both of you with me, but it would be safer for you to travel separately. This way I know that even if you escape, you will follow. Sin, if either of the men move, kill the other.’

Woo was tempted to risk it, but sacrificing the Doctor in such a manner wouldn’t be honourable. Besides, the Doctor seemed to have previous knowledge of this group, so his survival was vital if Woo was

going to learn all he could. He relaxed slightly, his teeth itching, as one of the guards pulled Romana out of the brig.

‘Take her to the launch, I’ll explain everything to her there,’ Hsien-Ko ordered.

As the guard escorted Romana out of sight, Sin backed away towards the door, his eyes glinting as sharply as bodkin points. It was as if he were trying to will them into provoking him. Once he was outside, two more guards came in, each with one of Woo’s Colts. They motioned to the Doctor and Woo to leave the brig.

Hsien-Ko looked away slightly as the Doctor glared at her.

Sin, however, glared right back. ‘I know you won’t really see,’

Hsien-Ko said, ‘but this is not how I would prefer it to be.’

Woo thought she looked genuinely remorseful, but long experience had taught him how easily that could be faked. ‘I can only ask you to bear with me for now. In two days, you will see that I am not the monster you think. I know you will understand then that what I am doing is for the best, and I hope you will forgive me, but for the moment you are misguided.’

‘One of us is. If you’re planning to bring back Weng-Chiang, it won’t be the best for anyone,’ said the Doctor.

She looked sideways at the guards, who had bristled at this insult to their god. ‘We shall see. Guards, take them to the forward hold where they’ll have a little more room, and wait for the launch to come back for them.’ With that, she turned, leading Sin off into the darkness.

Fourteen

The Doctor and Woo were led down a steep companionway towards the bowels of the ship. Woo suspected that the word bowels was particularly apt in this case; the cargo hold they were shown into had been converted for quite a different purpose.

Stoves fed by gas canisters glowed blue under extra large woks which bubbled and steamed with some boiling slime inside. Wide ports were opened in the walls to allow the fumes to escape. Coolies tended the woks, occasionally putting in further dollops of a dark glue-like resin. 'Refining raw opium,' the Doctor murmured.

Woo nodded. 'Du would have a seizure if he knew the Black Scorpion had copied his strategy.'

'Joining the authorities, you mean? I assume you're talking about Du Yue Sheng.'

'Yes. You know him?'

'Only by reputation. Have his Great Circle gang made some sort of deal with Black Scorpion?'

'Hardly. Du was fit to bust when he heard about the Black Scorpion being in town.'

'You have watched too many American films.' The Doctor abruptly turned to the guard beside him. The thug stepped back, holding Woo's gun before him, as the Doctor proffered a small bag. 'Try this; it's much more wholesome. Still sort of addictive, but the only side-effect is potential toothache.' The guard slapped the bag from the Doctor's hand, scattering jelly babies across the grimy deck.

To Woo's surprise, the Doctor bent to scoop them up. 'A simple no thanks would have done. Why does a person's vocabulary decrease when they pick up guns?'

The guard lifted a foot to kick the Doctor into obedience, but the Doctor suddenly twisted, throwing a loop of his scarf around the man's other leg. A sharp tug sent him sprawling backwards into a pile of burlap sacks. The other guard reached past Woo to aim his Colt at the Doctor, but Woo had already realized what the Doctor's plan was. He instinctively grabbed the guard's arm and pulled him forward into

a sharp double-blow from one elbow.

The first guard had recovered and charged at the Doctor.

The Doctor neatly sidestepped, sticking out a leg to trip the guard, who hurtled through one of the wide rectangular ports.

There was a brief yell and a splash from outside.

The coolies who were tending the opium pans picked up knives and clubs that were handy, and started to wind their way through the rows of woks. The Doctor, quickly pulling the rubber hose from one of the burners, opened the valve on the canister. A tongue of flame streamed across the hold, igniting the tables and sacks, to provide a wall of flame to separate the coolies from themselves. Woo was impressed by the Doctor's quick thinking.

The coolies leapt back as the flames swept across the deck.

Woo was able to recover his guns from the deck before the fleeing men could get more than a few steps towards the bulkhead door on the far side; these scum wouldn't get away to start up somewhere else. His fingers squeezed down on the triggers, but instead of the familiar kick of recoil, there was a wrench and the guns were gone.

The Doctor had somehow grabbed them both out of his hands without getting shot in the process. Woo was too astounded even to be outraged. He found it difficult to be angered by something that he couldn't face as having happened. 'These people are ruthless killers. The only two ways to deal with them are either put them down before they get you, or live with looking over your shoulder all the time.'

'Yes, yes...The weed of crime, and all that. You have a very interesting moral sense, you know, real film-censor quality. I'm sure Romana could write a thesis.' He tossed the guns back to Woo.

'They will start somewhere else.' Woo thought the Doctor, of all people, would understand.

'Who knows – Don't say it! If we're going to work together, you're going to have to stop acting like Chow Yun Fat on a bad hair day. No killing.' Woo was astounded again.

What made the Doctor think he could tell him what to do? The Doctor fixed him with a grim look, and Woo suddenly remembered that almost everyone in the Black Scorpion seemed to be afraid of the

Doctor, or at least view him as a threat. There was something in the Doctor's expression and tone of voice that made that attitude quite reasonable, even though Woo was the one who was armed. The Doctor's quick thinking with the gas canister had shown Woo that this was someone you wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of, even though he wasn't likely to resort to violence. 'I won't tolerate killing, d'you understand?'

Woo nodded carefully, putting on the safety catches of both guns. 'All right.'

'Good.' The Doctor's mood lightened slightly and he ran a hand through his hair. 'If nothing else, all this shooting is terribly unimaginative – Have you ever read Sun Tzu?'

'*The Art of War*? Of course, I have one of his original handwritten manuscripts.'

'Then remember his first rule – it's a greater honour to defeat the enemy without resorting to battle.'

'Is that what you do?' He certainly wouldn't call the Doctor's methods battling.

'Well, one tries, you know. I did try to warn him to make that bit a rather longer paragraph or people would ignore it, but he insisted he knew what he was doing. Call it the art of fighting without fighting.'

'I don't remember that bit of *The Art of War*.'

'Of course you don't; that was Bruce Lee.'

'Who?' Woo's mind was already replaying the conversation so far, sure there was something he had to clarify.

'Never mind, he hasn't been born yet.'

'Just a moment; Sun Tzu lived two and a half thousand years ago. You couldn't have met him.'

The Doctor grimaced, as if he were an actor in a bedroom farce who'd just been caught in a compromising position.

'You don't want to go listening to me; I never do, at least not unless I need intelligent conversation.'

Woo understood perfectly. 'We've been down among these opium

burners too long. Come on; Hsien-Ko's stateroom was back this way.'

* * *

Hsien-Ko stood at the prow of her motor launch as it pulled away from the ship. She knew that the Doctor was a good man, he could be made to understand; all that her father had written about him suggested it. Nevertheless, it was clearly wise to hold him in safekeeping until she was ready to show him how he could help. She certainly didn't want him to distract her with more misguided interference.

She was well aware that her scientific knowledge, though among the best in the world, couldn't hold a candle to that possessed by the future genii who had developed the principles she was following. Those scientists would have been aware of discoveries which were yet to be made. That was where the Doctor came in; he would be able to fill in the gaps once she was free to retire into private research. If he refused, then at least she wouldn't have lost anything.

She didn't dare risk his interference in this operation, however. He would have to wait until it was finished and Weng-Chiang had been snatched out of the past. She hoped Romana's presence would ensure his cooperation; she could be released after the operation was complete. Who knows, she might even have useful knowledge herself.

Hsien-Ko thought about this. It was a reasonable assumption, if Romana was an associate of the Doctor's.

Furthermore, if she was unaware of the details of the Doctor's previous encounter with Weng-Chiang, then she might be more amenable to rendering immediate assistance.

First, however, there was a matter of insubordination. She turned to where Kwok was watching her from the wheelhouse, beckoning him over. 'What is it?' he asked.

'Why did you send men to kill the Doctor after I ordered that he be exiled?'

Kwok rubbed gently at the bandage over his eye. 'He and that policeman are dangerous. I don't want them to hurt you.'

She had expected that; it was his answer to almost everything. Though flattering, it could become tiresome when it led him to do things she hadn't sanctioned. 'So you try to save me by causing me to lose face?

Is the Tong to follow me, or you?' It was his deference to her on duty that provided the rest of the organization with a precedent for following a woman; they could always convince themselves that he was the real power behind the throne. If, on the other hand, Kwok should ever try to take on that position, the only way she would have a chance of proving to the Tong that she was genuinely strong enough to lead would be to kill him.

She wondered if she would be strong enough to kill someone she had loved for many years now. Somehow she doubted it. She knew that he would know all this too, and trusted that he felt the same way about her. 'Speak frankly,' she told him.

He sighed. 'Many of the men constantly watch you for signs of feminine weakness. The Tong way is to kill our enemies. Merely sending them away could be taken as that sign of weakness.'

'Killing the Doctor would show I fear him. Isn't fear a weakness?' She clenched her fist, then tried to force herself to relax. 'The Doctor is not an enemy, but a friend who needs...convincing. He has much knowledge that will benefit us. If any man has a quarrel with my leadership, let him come and tell me. Those who attend his funeral can judge for themselves how weak I am.'

'Does that apply to me?'

'Do you have a quarrel?'

He took her hand, using one finger of his free hand to brush a stray lock of hair away from her face. 'No. I'm afraid for you.'

She tried not to feel better for that, but couldn't help releasing a little smile. 'Then show it by trusting that I know what I'm doing, not by undermining my authority.'

Kwok stood silently for a moment. 'Sorry. It won't happen again.'

'I know. Go and set the geomantic compass for Dong Lake.'

'At once.' He released her hand and returned to the wheelhouse. Hsien-Ko looked along to where Sin stood on guard outside the storeroom which held Romana, and concentrated on moving his arm to put his knife away. She wouldn't need him after all, she was delighted to see.

The passageways from the hold back to Hsien-Ko's stateroom were devoid of life, though there were sounds of activity from above decks. Woo was about to check the room with drawn guns but the Doctor strolled in without bothering to wait. Woo followed, wondering where they could have gone – where they could have taken Romy.

Not that it made too much difference, he told himself.

Romy was obviously not available. Still, that didn't mean he couldn't care about what happened to her. If they harmed her, they would regret it. That dwarf in particular looked like a nasty piece of work, and most likely mechanical. His friend Lucas Seyton had a tiny automated duck which could walk and spread its metal feathers by means of an ingenious and intricate mechanism, but that dwarf was even more astonishing. 'Doctor?'

'Hmm?'

'What was that dwarf thing?'

'The Peking Homunculus.'

'It is mechanical, isn't it?'

'In a very sophisticated way. It has an automaton's body controlled by a sophisticated motherboard. It has a sense of self, though, because the motherboard is cross-patched into the cerebral cortex of a pig.'

Woo shuddered involuntarily. 'That sounds obscene. Who would make such a thing?'

'Weng-Chiang. That's the sort of little toy that appealed to his twisted little mind.'

'Then it has no practical purpose? Hsien-Ko said it was a tool.'

'Oh, it has a purpose. It's an assassination weapon; the computer circuit makes it very efficient, but the pig part gives it a lust for blood and death, so that its attacks are more vicious than a pure machine's would be. Weng-Chiang infiltrated it into his rival's home as a toy for the woman's children. It massacred the family – supposedly due to some malfunction – and very nearly started World War Six. After the turmoil of the following years, Weng-Chiang brought it back from the fifty-first century to the nineteenth, where I thought I'd destroyed it.'

The Doctor wasted no time in searching through the desk drawers.

They contained only a few pens and pieces of stationery. He looked at the stationery edge-on, presumably looking to see if any impressions had been left behind on it, then dropped it back disdainfully. 'Probably for taking the lunch orders.' He leant against the wall, tapping around it experimentally. 'Aha.' He peered closely behind the desk.

'That's odd.' He started to chip away at the panelling with a penknife. There was a milky sheen of grey metal behind it.

'Interesting.'

'Armour plating?'

'Lead sheets. She must be afraid of Superman spying on her.'

'Why would she be afraid of X-rays?'

'She doesn't seem to smoke, so I doubt she's worried about getting bad news from a radiologist. Just a minute...' The Doctor pulled a little black box with a dial on it from his pocket. 'I thought I still had it lying around...' The box crackled slightly as the Doctor moved out of the stateroom.

Woo followed the Doctor out into the passageway. The black box was crackling more fiercely now and Woo could see the dial on it quiver violently. 'Is that a Geiger counter?' That was worrying; no one really knew what effect radiation exposure would have on people. It didn't seem to have done Hsien-Ko any harm of course, though Woo had the uncomfortable feeling that either there was some less desirable side-effect to her condition, or it was far rarer than any other kind of energy. Probably both.

'There's been a highly radioactive substance here, and quite recently too,' said the Doctor.

'This chronon radiation of yours?'

'No. Good old-fashioned alpha and gamma radiation. Uranium 238, probably.'

Woo's profession demanded a good memory for current affairs, and headlines from the previous decade came to mind.

Hadn't some girls in watch factories died from leukaemia after using their mouths to wet the brushes with which they painted radium onto

luminous watches? 'Isn't that very dangerous?'

'Yes,' the Doctor said in a low and dark voice. 'Dangerous at best, but, depending on what you want to do with it...'

Somehow Woo wasn't expecting the Tong of the Black Scorpion to use it for watchmaking. Besides, privileged access to the Sakura Kai's intelligence reports had their uses.

'Rumour has it that it could provide the theoretical basis for a huge bomb.'

'The Tong of the Black Scorpion with nuclear capability... But to do what?'

Woo shook his head. 'I wish I knew.' He gave the desk a rather petulant kick. It moved to the side. The Doctor was with him instantly, shoving at a corner. It rolled aside, leaving exposed a small trapdoor set into the floor.

'We should have brought K9; he's always wanted to be a truffle hound.' The Doctor pulled the trapdoor open. Inside were a number of folders and a scroll. The Doctor lifted them out, handing Woo the scroll, while he opened the topmost folder. He grimaced. 'Personnel files.'

Woo untied the silk ribbon from around the scroll and glanced it. 'Doctor, look at this.'

The Doctor tossed the folders aside and helped Woo spread the sheet across the table. It was a hand-inked map with many sinuous Chinese dragons here and there, and a compass rose marked with symbols from the I Ching. 'Aha, this looks a little more useful.'

'It's a *feng shui* map of eastern China.'

The Doctor studied it closely. 'Yes, that's what I thought. These lines show the *lung mei*, the Paths of the Dragon.'

'Dragon Paths!' It could hardly be coincidence. 'That was the phrase Hsien-Ko used.' The Doctor's story about instantaneous travel was obviously mistaken somehow; but if they could find out which path Hsien-Ko was following, they could follow. There were so many paths, though. How could they tell where she was going? 'I don't see the connection. These are what you westerners call ley lines, yes? There was a man called Lethbridge a couple of years ago who thought he'd

discovered them, though they've been known here for centuries.'

'Not quite. What Lethbridge discovered were the alignments set up as part of a confused memory of the Euterpians' song-lines – a means of harnessing the energy inherent in the Earth's magnetosphere to act as signal beacons. The Dragon Paths are a rather more accurate depiction of the Earth's own lines of telluric current.'

'Lines of what?'

'Yes... If you put a magnet at the heart of a field of iron filings, they polarize and form a sort of distorted concentric pattern. The core of the Earth is made of semi-liquid allotropic iron. Convection in the outer core produces lines of magnetic force – the magnetosphere. Near the Earth's surface, these lines are distorted by some deposits in the mantle and crust, and those are your Dragon Paths. Movement inside a magnetic field produces electricity, and since the core, mantle and lithosphere of the Earth are all moving relative to each other, they generate telluric current in the magnetosphere. Magnus Greel's zygma beam intersects all this like a falling stone intersects with the surface of a river.'

'It creates a splash? Ripples?'

'Exactly. Ripples of chronon energy flowing along the lines of telluric current.'

'Then the Dragon Paths are like wires carrying a telephone signal?'

'With physical beings or equipment being the signal. Now look here.' The Doctor pointed to a mountain symbol at the heart of a web of lines and symbols. 'This seems to be a central nexus of these Dragon Paths.'

'That's T'ai Shan, the sacred mountain.'

'The sacred mountain...I wonder what the geology of that place is like. It must have some similarity to the rock in that quarry near Hsien-Ko's house.'

'Geology?'

'Certain types of mineral deposits occur where several lines meet, and those are the interstices where vehicles can go through. Ah! Of course! Ripples of chronon energy...If enough energy from these telluric currents could be combined into a strong enough chronon feedback,

there could be a temporal shift big enough to reach back along the zygma beam.'

'You've lost me.'

'What?' the Doctor looked momentarily flustered. He pulled a small table-tennis bat with the ball attached to it by a length of elastic from his pocket. 'Look. This bat is the fifty-first century, the ball is Magnus Greel's Time Cabinet at the moment of its arrival in 1873, and the elastic is the zygma beam that propelled the cabinet back to the nineteenth century.'

Now imagine grabbing the elastic halfway down, at the level of this year' – he did so – 'and twitching it like this.' The ball leapt up into the hand with which he had twitched the elastic.

'And *voilà*; fifty years' worth of chronon energy spread throughout the Dragon Paths. Right now the energy of any given current moment is enough to transmit any number of people across the globe. Fifty years' worth would be more than enough to pierce the interstices of the space-time vortex, and enable the Black Scorpion to literally step into any time period in Earth's history. It seems Greel was right in a way; the zygma experiment did work, just not in a way even he could envisage.'

'What would be the point? Of stepping into other eras, I mean.'

'I'd have thought that was obvious. Imagine a world where the Black Scorpion have weapons from hundreds of years in the future, or where they can plunder the everyday items of the past to sell as antiques and deposit the profits in the past, thus making a fortune in compound interest. And that's just small-time stuff for someone as intelligent as Hsien-Ko. What if she were to go back and prevent the Manchus from usurping the Mings? Or take those guns she got from that German and take over the Chinese Empire in Qin's time? It hardly bears thinking about.'

'Then where does Weng-Chiang come into this? The Tong members seem to be awaiting his second coming.'

'So I heard. Weng-Chiang was a convenient identity adopted by Magnus Greel sixty-four years ago. A supernatural figure was an obvious pseudonym for someone who arrived as if by magic, by unknown technology.' The Doctor flourished the little rubber ball. He looked back at the bat suddenly, with an indrawn breath. 'Is that what she's trying to do? It can't possibly work...'

‘What?’

‘I’m just wondering if she means to snatch Weng-Chiang out of the zygma beam at a point before he arrived in London. If they short out the zygma beam, the Time Cabinet will be drawn back here with it. As a side-effect, they’ll get Magnus Greel alive and well in 1937.’

‘I take it this Magnus Greel isn’t the sort of person we’d like to have around?’

‘Definitely not. He’s a war criminal with the blood of millions on his hands – thousands of them cannibalized at the cellular level in his own obsessive search for immortality. He even has the long fingernails of a Chinese vampire. Unfortunately, we can’t just call up Lam Ching Ying and let him get to work with the old wooden sword and dog’s blood. The point is that Hsien-Ko would be creating an alternate timeline; one in which Weng-Chiang could cannibalize all of humanity. Not only that, but she herself would never have been irradiated with chronons, and might even have died before now. In that case we’d have a temporal paradox on our hands.’

‘What can we do, then?’

‘Get to T’ai Shan before they can trigger the energy release, then try to stop it.’

‘How do we do that?’

‘I haven’t the faintest idea; most civilizations consider this line of technology to be worthless, so nobody has ever really explored it very well.’

‘Perhaps we could ask them, if we can get to T’ai Shan.’

‘If we had one of their geomantic compasses we could follow them through the Dragon Path. As it is, we’ll have to take more mundane transport.’

Woo nodded mutely. All this talk of *lung mei* and instantaneous transportation was fascinating, but surely a fantasy. Hsien-Ko, after all, had left by a perfectly ordinary boat. Nevertheless, they had to do what they could.

The Doctor went over to the window that looked out from the stern of the ship and opened it to give a blast on his dog whistle. Somewhere out in the mist, an engine spluttered into life.

K9 had cut a hole in the boat's dashboard and extended the probe from between his eyes directly into the wiring: Once he had started the boat, he lowered his head between the spokes of the steering wheel in order to guide it towards the source of the Doctor's summons.

Several humans were looking over the edge of the high sterncastle even before K9's infravision identified the twin hearts of the Doctor in a window below. The humans on deck were shouting and pointing, but K9 ignored them to concentrate on getting the boat into position under the window.

The humans started shooting; fortunately their bullets were incapable of penetrating K9's casing or the hull of the boat.

They could harm the Doctor and Woo, but K9 couldn't move his head into a firing position without losing control of the boat.

Calculating the right moment from which the boat would coast the rest of the way, K9 cut off the flow of electricity and the engine died. He tilted his head back, extending his blaster muzzle. K9 knew that the Doctor wouldn't appreciate his killing these men, so he restrained himself to a stun level as usual, and started firing.

The speedboat drifted in to bump gently against the stern of the ship. Woo was about to try leaning out the window to shoot at the men on deck, when a red flash split the air. He jumped back. 'What the -'

'It's all right, it's only K9.' The Doctor looped his scarf and tossed it out to catch on the pennon at the prow of the speedboat. 'I'll explain later. Get into the boat.'

Still wondering what sort of Wellsian death ray could spit red light like that, Woo slipped out of the window and dropped into the speedboat. He immediately started the engine, but held the steering wheel firmly in place so that the boat would remain still for the Doctor to follow him down. The Doctor dropped into the seat beside him, then leant forward to unravel his scarf from the bow pennon as Woo gunned the engine.

Another body dropped into the back of the boat: a Tong soldier with a knife. The Doctor turned in his seat to grab the man's knife-hand. Woo noticed what was happening, but saw that the Tong man was precariously balanced. He twisted the wheel and the speedboat tilted

sideways, tipping the Tong soldier into the river.

K9 and the soldiers still on the junk exchanged a last couple of shots as the speedboat surged away from the ship. Woo had escaped from gunmen before, but felt much more exhilarated this time. Perhaps it was the refreshing cool mist in his face after the acrid heat of the opium burners.

He laughed delightedly.

Fifteen

The motor-launch had travelled eastwards along the Huangpu for a mile or two, leaving the morass of junks and sampans behind. Ahead, Romana could see that they were approaching the mouth of the river.

She was more interested in watching the boat's pilot at the simple controls. She stood up from the small folding seat on which she had been placed and went over to the pilot, half expecting someone to stop her. Neither of the guards did, and nor did the pilot, though the Peking Homunculus watched her without changing its carnal expression.

The controls were simple – wheel, throttle, speed indicator and so on – but in place of a normal compass was a larger version of the geomantic compass she had seen the Tong's assassins wear in their lockets. Kwok and Hsien-Ko came into the wheelhouse from outside. Kwok started towards her. 'Sit down.'

'It's all right,' Hsien-Ko interrupted. 'Let her watch. She'll need to understand anyway. Set course for Dong Lake.'

Kwok nodded and reached out to start rotating the concentric rings of the geomantic compass. When he had rearranged the rings to his satisfaction, Romana could see pale flashes of blue lighting flicker across it. Abruptly, the water around the boat appeared to rear up and spin overhead. For an instant, Romana thought the water was going to swamp the launch as it had loomed high above the windows. Then she realized that it was only the distorting effect of passing through the Dragon Path. Unfortunately, she had no way of telling how far they had gone.

The Doctor might be familiar enough with this planet to make a fair guess, but she wasn't. From the view out of the windows, she could see that they were now on a wider body of water. The shore was visible on every side, which meant they were now on a lake rather than the river.

There were other boats on the water – mainly little sampans with individual fishermen – but Romana ignored them, feeling Hsien-Ko's eyes on her. 'Impressive, is it not?' the Chinese woman asked.

It certainly was, for a human. Perhaps this ingenuity was why the Doctor seemed to like them so much. 'I suppose so, though it's a little

basic.’ Actually, it was more sophisticated than a civilization of this level should have attained, according to all the textbook models. So far none of the places she had visited with the Doctor matched the textbook models, though, and she was beginning to wonder if anywhere did.

‘Oh, you can speak frankly here. It’s very basic. My body has been charged with Dragon energy since before birth and can walk the Dragon Paths. Others can too, if they have a sample of my cells and a guidance mechanism.’

‘The guidance mechanism being the geomantic compasses.’

‘The Dragon Paths are electrically based, so iron deposits or water and so on affect the paths. The settings on the compass form a tiny analogue of the world’s magnetic field, tuned to the path of the destination you wish to reach, and the principle of the transformer does the rest by expanding that analogue to effect the Earth’s magnetic field.’

‘Did you build them?’

‘No, I merely donated some blood samples to give them the required sensitivity to the dragon energy. Professor Ying made them, after I had explained how I myself could walk the Dragon Paths. I’m sure the Doctor would be able to find many problems with the system, but it works well enough for our purposes.’

‘And what purposes are those?’

‘Now that would be telling, but instantaneous transportation to any place on Earth does have some obvious applications, no?’

‘No, I mean, yes, obviously. I presume your next step is to try to extend the Dragon Paths through time.’

Hsien-Ko nodded. ‘I know that time travel is possible. Weng-Chiang achieved it, which means we can too.’

‘To bring him back? Are you sure that’s such a good idea? According to the Doctor, he was quite an unlikable person.’

‘The Doctor speaks from a biased point of view.’ Hsien-Ko looked sideways at the pilot. ‘Weng-Chiang’s return is something I hunger for, desperately. I have much business to conduct with him. I think the Doctor would approve.’

'I very much doubt it.'

'I know you do.' She fixed Romana with a firm look.

'Everything that my father and the Tong have done in Weng-Chiang's name are good reasons to expect more bloodshed. I can only give my word that this will not happen, and that what I am doing is for the good of all.' She did look truthful, Romana noted. At least, she looked as if she believed she was being truthful. 'You are not a prisoner here. When we dock, you are free to go where you like, though heading back to Shanghai will mean you will probably miss the Doctor on his way here. No one will stop you, wherever you decide to go.'

'That doesn't sound very good strategy.'

'No? If you leave, you learn nothing, will be out of our way, and without a Dragon compass you won't reach Shanghai until our work here is complete anyway. Therefore you are no danger. If you stay here, you will learn that I mean to benefit this country, and indeed the world. Again, you are therefore no danger, and may prove helpful.' Romana was surprised. This was definitely not the sort of behaviour she had come to recognize in the people she had met in her short time travelling with the Doctor.

On the other hand, perhaps Hsien-Ko was being clever, knowing that someone who had gone to such lengths to discover things about her would not want to leave when the chance to find out more information presented itself.

'Personally, most of us will go and get something to eat in town. I'd suggest you do the same.' With a knowing smile, Hsien-Ko turned back and left the wheelhouse.

Kwok followed Hsien-Ko as a coolie laid out a gangplank to the jetty. The brick-red roofs of the low buildings of Tai'an were spread out to the west, while the green edge of a small park was visible on the far side of the lake. With anyone other than Hsien-Ko, Kwok would have thought the offer to Romana was a sign of weakness or erratic behaviour. So far, however, Hsien-Ko had been proved right, and he trusted that she would be again. Above all else, she knew what she was doing.

'You disapprove?' Hsien-Ko asked, before he spoke.

'If it were anyone else...'

‘Romana clearly has knowledge of the same sophistication as the Doctor; I would rather have them help us. If we were to treat her as a prisoner, not only would her mind be turned against us, but she would probably escape and observe us from some hiding-place. This way, we can keep an eye on her and control what she observes. I hope, therefore, to make best use of her intelligence.’

‘Unless she decides to leave.’

‘In her position, would you?’

‘No.’ He was right; she knew what she was doing. ‘We should impose some restrictions on her movements – until full power has been achieved in the transmitter and the correct resonance frequency for the Dragon Paths has been attained.’

Hsien-Ko nodded sharply. ‘Entry to the generator control rooms and the core cavern should be by ID card and password identification only. Afterwards, once we’re finished with it, it won’t matter whether she gets in or not.’

* * *

Li peered out of the tiny barred window that was the only light source in the empty storeroom. His pointed chin and wide jaw were bruised from his capture. Being locked up was a new experience for him, and he wasn’t enjoying it at all. From the window, he could see the jagged peaks of T’ai Shan; he had so far been unable to work out how he had travelled so far so quickly. True, he recalled what the Doctor had told him, but that nonsense could hardly be true, could it?

Yet he couldn’t think of a better explanation; he was a police inspector, not some superstitious peasant. If sound and messages could be sent by wireless, then why not people? No, he told himself, that way lies madness. He must concentrate not on the how, but the why, of this weird journey he had made.

Being able to move from place to place instantly, without passing through the space in between, would give an obvious tactical advantage not just to bandits, but the Kuomintang.

How could an enemy guard against a force who could be in their midst suddenly and unannounced?

They couldn’t, and the obvious enemy right now was the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria. It wouldn’t be long before they moved

south and west, into the rest of China. His thoughts were interrupted as Ying opened the door to his impromptu cell. Li immediately hurled himself at the traitor, but Ying knocked him back into the corner with a simple open-handed punch. Ying had always been better at unarmed combat, Li knew, but his laboratory-bound occupation made it easy – and therefore painful – to forget.

Ying shook his head, his lips as much of a horizontal line as his moustache. ‘You were offered a chance to live. Now the Doctor isn’t here to save you.’

‘Why are you working for them?’

‘I paid my dues to the Black Scorpion before I ever joined the authorities. It was something of a traditional occupation for the young men of my village. The question is, what have you been doing, and why are you here?’

The answer was simple, of course. He was here by accident. They would never believe that, however, and in any case there were rules for this sort of situation as there were for any other. ‘I’ve nothing to say to you, traitor.’

Ying smiled. ‘Oh, you don’t have to talk to me. Hsien-Ko and Kwok are waiting for you.’

* * *

At the heart of the dust cloud that swirled through Tai’an, a bustling camp had been set up in the grounds of the old Dai temple. Most of the dust was rising from the thousands of feet that tramped along the streets, while the heavy tyres of numerous vehicles added to the confusion.

Generators hummed on the backs of flatbed trucks, while pairs of fatigue-clad soldiers lugged large cable drums towards a grand archway only a few yards from a hotel. Armed guards patrolled everywhere, and men were carrying stencilled crates from place to place.

T’ai Shan stretched wide above them, like a dusty saw-edged tusk striving to reach the heavens. A V-shaped cutting was chiselled into the peak, a wide staircase zigzagging down the steepest parts of the sloping path. Trees and shrubs lined the track, which occasionally disappeared behind rock outcroppings and twists in the meltwater stream beds which wended their way down-slope. The black tips of

anti-aircraft guns protruded from their sandbagged nests on several promontories as a reminder that they were very close to the wavefront of the Japanese advance.

The nearby lychees gave way to cypress and pine, the path sometimes disappearing through tunnels of trees. The brightly coloured walls of temples and pagodas were also visible through the trees on the lower slopes, and the sounds of splashing water came from somewhere off to the right.

Romana ignored the hustle and bustle. She looked around the main street from the jetty curiously, wondering whether this was some kind of trick. The uniformed men busy all around gave her looks that varied between curiosity and suspicion, but no one stood in her way.

On impulse, she took out the tracer and sampled the local area, making sure that nobody was looking in her direction.

The tracer was still ticking, but the strength of the signal was definitely increasing. It seemed to be strongest when she directed the tracer northwards, towards the sandy mountain that overshadowed both the lake and the town. Intrigued, and wanting to test just how free she really was, she walked towards the gentle slopes of the mountain.

Cypress mingled with ginkgos and acacias in the courtyard around the sprawling Dai temple complex with its curving roofs and faded primary colours. The intricate woodwork and masonry indicated that this was a temple complex, though the buildings now had telephone wires and noticeboards attached.

Through the open doors and windows of several buildings, Hsien-Ko could see drab men and women toiling away at desks, doing her bidding. Ahead of her, the main hall – the Tiangong – loomed above the flattened former ornamental gardens. It was a sixty-foot-high wooden building sitting proudly in the centre of the complex, its exquisite wooden construction topped with a yellow-tiled double roof. A seven-foot column carved into a statue of some ancient god or emperor stood guard outside.

Buildings visible outside the temple complex – mostly of one storey with scalloped roofs – were gaily coloured. The whole view was slightly blurred by the dust from moving trucks and marching troops that filled the streets. Kwok held the door open for her as she entered her temporary headquarters.

Hsien-Ko stopped with a look of surprise when she saw Li slumped in a chair in the corner, handcuffed to the chair and guarded by a soldier. 'What is he doing here?'

Professor Ying rose from his desk. 'He stowed away in one of the weapon shipments for the defensive emplacements.'

'It seems that the Great Circle footsoldiers can't take a hint.' Hsien-Ko didn't doubt for a moment that he belonged to the rival group. The police force was riddled with Tong members, especially the Great Circle. Ever since Du Yue Sheng had taken over the Ministry of Opium Control, he had seeded the authorities with his own men.

Kwok grabbed Li's arm and rolled back the sleeve to display the scarlet tattoo there. 'Caught red-handed.'

'You will be executed for this,' Li hissed.

'I think not.' Hsien-Ko was saddened. Li could never be useful like the Doctor or Romana, and nor was he harmless.

He was just an enforcer who would only jail or kill them, and there was only one way to be one hundred per cent sure that he wouldn't. Besides, there was an etiquette in dealings between the Tongs, and that too demanded only one course of action.

'Kill him. Sew up his mouth the old way and dump the body where Du will be sure to find it.' Li paled despite his defiant look. 'Ying, Kwok, come with me.'

They left the room, Hsien-Ko feeling another little part of herself shrivel up and die inside. Du Yue Sheng's Great Circle Tong would have to be given a message that the Black Scorpion could take care of its own, and wouldn't tolerate sabotage.

She wondered if she would have felt better if she could have brought new life into the world. At least, then, there would be more of a balance. Unfortunately, the same Dragon energy that had maintained her youth and enabled her to walk the Dragon Paths had rendered her body as barren as she sometimes feared her soul might become. It was another effect she could lay at Weng Chiang's door; god of abundance, indeed!

It had hurt that Sin could best be disguised as a child. It was a constant reminder of what she could never have. She withstood it, however, telling herself that it was a fitting penance for her lifestyle.

Perhaps it would help balance her soul. She repressed a shudder, reminding herself that faith in their god kept her troops in line. That thought inspired mixed feelings in her.

She walked out of the main hall. Her troops would have to climb the mountain, step by step, to lay the cables, but no such restriction applied to her. 'Take my hand,' she told both men.

They did so, and she stepped out of sight, taking Ying and Kwok with her.

Romana had ascended the first couple of hundred steps without incident, and soon noticed that the pathway up the mountain was bordered not just by many temples and shrines, but by a number of cave mouths as well.

At first she had had no desire to see what was inside until she saw a large cable drum lying on its side outside one cave.

Insulated cables as thick as her wrist snaked off into the darkness of the cave. Romana followed the thick cables curiously; they had clearly been designed to carry huge amounts of energy, but to and from where?

Before long, she realized that the cave was not completely dark. There were pools of light ahead, cast by simple bulbs, but the cables could hardly be for such a simple thing. They were laid along the floor anyway, while a thinner wire ran between the light bulbs.

The tunnel soon began to wind upwards, and she passed the occasional fatigue-clad soldier working on junction boxes.

They paid her no heed. Her calves were beginning to ache when she finally emerged into a small grotto.

It had a vaulted ceiling and several pillars running from floor to ceiling, thinning in the middle. She examined the rock pillars carefully. The rock had some sort of crystalline structure, which glittered across the surface like frost. The wires from the junction boxes on the ends of the cables were securely attached to the rock and wrapped several times around it. It could hardly be for earthing, she thought. Then an idea came to her. Many planets had crystal-bearing rock which often displayed energy releases under certain conditions.

Piezoelectricity, she recalled.

The question was, were the Tong trying to tap this type of natural energy, or cause it? More cables continued out of the far side of the grotto. She had come so far that she might as well see what else was down here, so she followed the cables once more.

* * *

Li had stared death in the face before, but it was something one never got used to. Hsien-Ko and Kwok were too busy even to stay and watch, which Li felt was inexplicably insulting. The soldier they had left to finish him off was busy searching the office for a needle and thread. That was the way of most of the Tongs, not just the Great Circle: an informer caught spying on a rival would have his mouth ritually sewn up, frequently with one or more of his fingers severed and placed inside first.

He was almost tempted to accept his fate, if only because – like most people – he couldn't really believe that death was imminent. Belief was a strange thing; someone had once tried to seduce his wife while Li was sitting with her. Li had been too surprised to give the man the beating he deserved, because his mind couldn't quite accept the idea that such a gross impropriety was actually happening.

To a certain extent, he felt the same way now. His training had been thorough and he knew that he had a slim chance of getting out of this, if he timed his movements well.

The chain of his handcuffs went through the supports of the back of the simple wooden chair, keeping his hands behind him. As the guard came back towards him, drawing his pistol, Li wrapped his fingers around those same supports. As soon as the guard was close enough, already stretching his arm out, Li lashed out with both legs. His feet landed on the soldier's chest, catapulting him backwards across a desk. The same force, however, propelled Li backwards in the chair, which crashed to the floor.

Li rolled with the fall, his legs reaching the floor behind his head, and straightened with some effort. Now he was standing, holding the chair by its back. Rushing over to the desk, Li smashed the chair across the guard's head and shoulders before he could recover enough to aim his gun. The guard's skull caved in, and he dropped. Li quickly took the handcuff keys from the guard's belt and freed himself. The guard's pistol was a standard KMT issue Browning like his own. Li was pleased, since this meant the spare magazines he had would fit this gun.

He needed to blend in with the crowd a little more, so he set about exchanging his suit for the guard's uniform.

Whatever the Black Scorpion were up to, it was obviously centred around the mountain, so that was where he would best be able to consider a strategy to defeat them.

He knew he would win in the end; order out of chaos was something he had had drummed into him all his life, and he wasn't about to start thinking any other way now. The soldier's uniform was a little loose on him, so Li wrapped his jacket around his waist before donning the uniform tunic. That would add a paunch that should help disguise him further. He didn't look very military, though; the trouser hems were some way above his ankles. One more disadvantage to being taller than most of his countrymen.

Once he was dressed, he adjusted the set of his field cap to cover his widow's peak and marched out of the building with a military step. The mountain started just beyond the large archway at the end of the street, and he could see that it wasn't far before he would reach the first cave into which he could disappear.

Kwok wasn't quite sure why Hsien-Ko had wanted the police box brought here, but he had obeyed anyway. It now stood by the Nantian Gate, more commonly known as the South Gate of Heaven.

The gate itself was a squat red-brick building stretching across the split peak at the top of the seven thousand steps that lined the mountain. A large archway was set into the bricks, flanked by two jade pillars. A temple of pale beige was sited atop the wide gate. Three smaller archways ran through that, and it was topped by a red roof.

The Doctor's police box stood just inside the gate, on a wide promenade that looked out eastwards over the vibrant green depressions between the three main peaks and their attendant promontories, all of which had temples or inns built upon them.

Paths lined with brightly coloured flowers led between the buildings and peaks, cutting through the verdant areas. Kwok was impressed despite himself. The word China originally meant 'perfumed garden' before coming to be associated more with the Middle Kingdom, and this was surely the garden in question. He was glad to have returned here with Hsien-Ko, as it calmed him considerably.

'What is this?' Ying asked, gazing curiously at the police box.

Hsien-Ko gave Kwok a knowing look. 'Another Time Cabinet, obviously...' She reached out to try the doors. A colourlessly bright flare of sparks exploded from the handle as her hand touched it, and Hsien-Ko flew backwards to crash into the dust a couple of yards away. A faint haze of blue smoke hung in the air between Hsien-Ko and the Doctor's box.

Kwok was at her side instinctively, terrified of what might have happened to her. She sat up with a grimace of pain, looking at her hand. To Kwok's dismay, the skin of her palm was scorched and blackened, but he was relieved that she seemed otherwise unhurt. 'Electrified?' he asked. The Doctor would regret having left such a dishonourable trick for her.

Hsien-Ko shook her head, unable to mask her pain.' 'The Dragon energy, I think. I should have expected that a Time Cabinet might short-circuit it.'

'Then why keep it?' Kwok didn't agree with hanging onto things which had been proven dangerous, especially to her.

'It's the carrot at the end of the stick. Also, it may prove more practical than Weng-Chiang's cabinet. You know what happened to him.'

Kwok shuddered at the thought. If this was a Time Cabinet, then it certainly didn't have the same risks as that used by Weng-Chiang, since the Doctor and Romana looked perfectly normal.

Hsien-Ko dusted herself off. 'Never mind this for the moment. Ying, how has construction proceeded?'

* * *

Woo tossed a mooring rope out towards a stout support on the end of a jetty on the Bund. It neighboured a small tour-boat wharf by the mouth of Suzhou Creek. The Doctor cut the speedboat's engines and guided it to a halt. Pale stone buildings with domed roofs and fluttering flags rose beyond the moored steamers and bustling junks.

The Doctor lifted K9 onto the jetty, then looked around.

'Hail a taxi. We should be able to cut along Bubbling Well Road and head straight for Nang Tao airfield from here.'

'Why Nang Tao?'

'It would take far too long to walk all the way to T'ai Shan. Unless you have a convenient autogyro or Lockheed Electron with automatic pilot?'

'They're being repainted,' Wood said with what he hoped was a straight face. 'Besides, I'd better pick up some things from the club first, and warn Rondo to keep an eye on things while I'm gone.'

'There are more important things at stake than your club. Romana's life, for one thing.'

'I'm well aware of that.' In truth, he could think of little else. He supposed it was a reaction to the way that instincts were repressed among his people. Only with a woman could he let himself go. This was the case for so many of his countrymen, but somehow he couldn't get round it. It seemed reasonable to assume that the Doctor had a prior stake, though this was by no means certain. 'Besides, the club is a vital tool in my work here.'

'For Dutch courage?'

'For gathering information and funding equipment.' He didn't want to discuss this; it would be better to get on with the job in hand before arguing over responsibilities like a *gaijin*. 'It won't take long. Anyway, it would probably help if we had enough money for the air fare. I tend not to carry that sort of cash when I'm out in the evenings.'

'You've got a point there, I suppose.'

* * *

The footsteps of Hsien-Ko, Kwok and Professor Ying echoed coldly from the jagged surfaces of the cavern which they were exploring. The rock around them glittered as quartz crystals reflected the light from their torches. 'Yes,' Ying was saying, 'this was ideal. The main section is through here.' They walked through a thick metal door which led into a concrete-smoothed chamber.

Hsien-Ko led the others through a set of thick doors and out onto the spotless floor of a room full of dark grey metal. The walls on the two shortest sides were lined with banks of dials and lamps. On the longer wall to the left, a great number of the large levers usually associated with railway signals and points were set into a platform below a long expanse of dark leaded glass.

The wall to the right was one long sloping window looking out on a

wide concrete floor twenty feet below. Several people in thick one-piece hooded suits were busying themselves at the tangled pipes and pumps of a large heat exchanger, which in turn was connected by several conduits to a trio of huge turbines wrapped in coils of wire. Thick cables disappeared out through channels drilled through the walls.

In the control room which Hsien-Ko and the others had entered, men and women in white lab coats were taking notes of the settings on the innumerable dials and meters. A row of the one-piece hooded suits not unlike those worn by deep-sea divers hung by the set of double doors through which they had come in. Ying, Kwok and Hsien-Ko went up to the platform.

Putting on almost black goggles which they took from their pockets before looking out through the leaded glass.

Beyond the thick walls and leaded glass was a beautiful grotto.

Huge buttresses of rock stretched up and down from this heart of the mountain like the principal arteries in a human heart. Scaffolding and telescopic pipes led down to the pool which flooded the lowest part of the grotto far below, while blocks and tackle were stretched between the stalactites like the strands of some enormous web. Slim cylinders attached to waterproofed cables hung from the blocks and tackle, while other cables were wound around the crystal-veined stalactites, with metal pitons hammered in here and there. Windows of thickly layered silvered glass were set into the rock wall near the points where cables and pipes disappeared out of the cavern. Ying said, 'We estimate that the primary coil will generate some fifteen thousand kilowatts. That's only an estimate, of course; we've only run it up to a multiplication factor of point five so far.'

'That estimate includes the extra generated by pressure differences caused by the temperature variations?' asked Hsein-Ko.

'Yes.'

She smiled. 'Excellent work, Ying. Weng-Chiang will be delighted with your efforts – if they are correct.'

'They are.'

'Remember that we will need those high voltages to resonate at high frequencies. The equipment you've requisitioned will handle that?'

‘I’d stake my life on it.’

‘You just did. And ours, too; if the system bums out...’

‘It won’t. The reactor cavern has been sealed and the pile flooded with heavy water as a moderator. We also have cadmium control rods that can limit the reaction if necessary. You have no need to fear any more.’ Ying gestured towards the grotto rather theatrically. ‘The Tong of the Black Scorpion is now the world’s first nuclear power.’

Sixteen

Romana had followed the cables through several grottoes, each higher than the last, until she reached a cave that was partitioned off by smooth concrete. Two guards drew their guns as she approached. 'No entry,' one of them said. 'Pass-holders only.'

Romana was interested at once. There must be something sensitive in there if access was restricted. She thought of checking the tracer, but didn't want to give away its use. 'I was just looking for the way out. These caves are very confusing.'

The guard pointed. 'That way.'

'Thank you,' Romana answered primly, walking off in the direction indicated. She soon emerged onto a plateau tens of yards wide, which had been turned into a landscaped garden.

A large temple structure dominated the plateau.

The temple was about seventy-five feet long, with vermilion walls inlaid with the finest carvings. The yellow tiles of its corrugated double roof gleamed like molten gold in a crucible formed by the surrounding peaks of neighbouring mountains.

A small stuccoed pavilion stood adjacent to each corner of the temple. The pavilions' roofs were supported only by delicate pillars, and had no walls. The pine-scented fresh breeze that blew through the gardens would undoubtedly be as refreshing to anyone in the pavilions as would the shade provided by the pointed golden roofs.

Hsien-Ko and Kwok were sitting in the shade of a cypress, holding each other and looking out at countryside spread beyond the mountain. Hsien-Ko was glad to have the chance to relax in this garden-like area and be pampered for a while. The reactor below was a miracle of engineering, but she loved the fresh air far more. The front line of the Japanese advance was only a few miles away and easily within sight of this elevated spot, but T'ai Shan was like a lighthouse for her; solid and immutable against the waves. 'It hardly seems possible, does it?'

'I suppose not.'

'You seem very curt today.'

Kwok nodded. 'I've nearly lost you several times in the past few days.' He fell silent for a few moments. 'I have never paid much attention to feelings, but I've been so afraid of that.'

When we first met, I wasn't looking for anything like this, but...'

Hsien-Ko understood perfectly. She had been bought by so many faceless men over her early years that the last thing she would look for was another. 'Sometimes people who aren't looking for anything find it anyway. It sometimes happens that a farmer ploughing his field will unearth some ancient and long-buried treasure. He wasn't looking for it, but he found it anyway. The question he has to ask himself is whether he should keep the treasure.'

'If he admires its beauty and it has value for him, then I'd say he should keep it.'

'I know.' She kissed his mouth. Her tongue traced the line of his upper lip while he wrapped his arms more tightly about her. He tasted of oranges. They separated at the sound of Romana's approaching footsteps. 'It's a beautiful view,'

Hsien-Ko commented, trying to cover the unexpectedly girlish embarrassment she felt. Kwok glowered silently.

Romana didn't disagree. 'Do you know what this mountain is called?' To Hsien-Ko's surprise, she didn't sound very worried, just curious.

'T'ai Shan, in Shangdong province. It's the holiest of the seven sacred mountains.'

'And how far is it from Shanghai?'

'About four hundred miles north-east, as the crow flies.' To travel such a distance smacked of magic, Hsien-Ko knew from long experience. 'Before the Dragon Paths, only Chang-Kao Lao could make such journeys. His donkey would carry him, then he would fold it up into a small piece of paper for safekeeping.' Romana looked round at her sharply, and she wondered why. 'I never asked why you and the Doctor came to Shanghai.' The Doctor had spoken of a segment of something...Perhaps it was something useful.

'We were looking for something – a key.'

'The trionic lattice that opens the Cabinet of Weng-Chiang? The Doctor destroyed it fifty years ago, and there was no spare.'

‘Another key. Why do you ask?’

‘I had wondered whether you came seeking myself; whether I had attracted the Doctor to Shanghai somehow.’

‘In a way you did. Your Dragon Paths – or the chronon energy behind them, rather – caused interference in our equipment.’ Hsien-Ko nodded thoughtfully. So use of the Dragon Paths could be detected and tracked. She wondered how that was done, since it would be prudent to develop a defence against it. Fortunately the Doctor’s box was in her possession and this equipment of his must be inside. That meant she could examine it at leisure. Romana looked around.

‘What’s so special about this mountain? Apart from being sacred.’

‘It was from here that the Boxer rebellion began. It also has a rock structure I find interesting. In terms of its meaning for the Tong of the Black Scorpion, this is where Weng-Chiang first arrived in 1872. His Time Cabinet appeared in a fireball in this temple, the Jade Emperor Temple. I have always felt at home here.’

* * *

Woo felt very tense and nervous as he entered the Club Do-San. Now that Hsien-Ko had identified him, there could easily be a squad of Tong assassins waiting for him.

The Doctor rapped the top of K9’s head with his knuckles.

‘Be alert; we need as many lerts as we can get.’

K9’s ear antennae started wagging by way of answer as they walked warily into the club. Everything seemed peaceful enough in the gilt and marble hallway, and only a few cleaners were around in the main floor. As Rondo emerged from the office Woo summoned him. ‘Rondo, get onto Nang Tao airfield and book seats for the first flight to Jining – two passengers and –’ he looked at K9 uncertainly ‘– some cargo.’

He turned back to the Doctor. ‘Help yourself to some refreshments; you probably need them and I won’t be long.’

Woo went through the door behind the fountain, but ignored the door to his office. Instead, he opened a concealed panel that masked a small lift and went up to his penthouse apartment above the club. He then strode into the white-walled room which had bamboo frames around the sliding partitions, taking off his coat. He lifted a *katana*

from the rack and slung it over his back, then put the coat back on. He carefully peeled half a dozen *shuriken* from a board on which they were mounted and dropped them into an inside pocket. From the shoulders of the suit of lacquered armour in the corner, he lifted a white belt with elaborate stitching. He didn't believe in good luck charms like the belt, but tradition was tradition and so ought to be observed.

Thus armed and turning to leave, he found the Doctor leaning against the door jamb. Woo froze. Only Rondo knew of this room and its contents, and in the current climate anyone else who knew of it was automatically dangerous. Woo suddenly felt a chilled ball form in the pit of his stomach. Was the Doctor working for the Sakura Kai after all? Or worse still, working for the Nationalists, who certainly wouldn't understand what he was doing here. Visions of a firing squad crept up on him.

The Doctor cleared his throat, holding up the framed death certificate from Woo's office. 'Ishiguro Takashi? I could see you weren't Ainu, since you can pass for Chinese, but your accent gave you away. I imagine you pass it off as being from a different province.'

'Hong Kong, actually.' Woo's mind raced; should he turn against the Doctor to protect his own secrets, or stick to their original plan and hope that the Doctor could see that they were on the same side?

'Why don't you tell me what a Japanese is doing posing as a Shanghai club owner and part-time vigilante?'

'You make it sound as if the two things are separate.'

Information might provoke a reaction from the Doctor that would make the decision easier. 'I am here solely to make certain that there is a united front against the Kwantung Army when they come south.'

'Against your own people?'

Woo knew it sounded unlikely: if his people were known for anything, it was loyalty. 'My brothers were civil servants in Tokyo. In February last year, there was a revolt by the First Infantry Division in Tokyo, engineered by the Cherry Society as part of a power struggle between the Kodo Ha and the Tosei Ha over their plans to expand the empire into other countries.'

'Starting with further consolidation in Manchuria,' the Doctor murmured.

‘Exactly. Many members of the government were killed before the mutiny was put down by imperial order.’

‘Including your brothers?’

‘Yes. As you see, I have no great love for the traitors who now run the imperial military. Most of the bigger criminal organizations here are gearing their efforts towards resisting any future invasion, and I don’t have any objection to that. Crime against the people here, though, that’s another matter. That is the sort of thing that distracts everyone from the real enemy.’ And stops them coming out to places like this, he added mentally. He shouldn’t really think that way; he was a warrior, not an innkeeper. So why did he have to remind himself of that more forcibly every time?

‘So you’re really living a double life to keep down any unauthorized crime that might distract this embryonic Resistance.’

‘Not exactly. Everything I do – the club, the culling of Shanghai’s underworld, everything – is with the express purpose of manipulating that resistance into the best possible force for defeating the Japanese military. There’s no duality or double life involved; I am simply myself. This Yan Cheh nomenclature is not a secret identity I have chosen, but a description given to me by the people here.’

The Doctor rubbed his nose. ‘There’s never anything very complex about revenge, is there?’

Romana had accompanied Hsien-Ko and Kwok back down to the Dai temple while telling them something of her adventures with the Doctor. She had carefully omitted any reference to whatever it was she was searching for, Hsien-Ko had noticed.

Weng-Chiang taught us that mankind would travel between the stars,’ Hsien-Ko commented as they entered the temple complex. ‘That they would abandon this planet and leave it in ruins. Of course, he lied about much.’

‘How can you tell?’

‘That was the sort of person he was: a crazed psychotic with delusions of grandeur.’

Romana’s eyes widened. ‘That doesn’t sound a very faithful thing to say about your god.’

Kwok's pockmarked face cracked into a brief smile and Hsien-Ko laughed aloud. 'Proof denies faith. I learnt of him while he was travelling the world with my father, searching for his Time Cabinet. Everything he ever said or did was purely with the objective of making himself seem greater and more important. He stayed on Earth as a part of the Supreme Alliance, therefore those who left were weak, in his eyes.'

'And you want to rescue him from his fate?'

'Rescue? I don't know that that is the right word. I want him here, now, yes. Beyond that...' She trailed off, noticing that the door to Li's prison was open. 'What?' She dashed over to the door and saw the dead guard lying amidst a maroon puddle. Of Li there was no sign. 'Kwok, notify everyone that Li has escaped. Tell them he is to be killed on sight.'

Rondo pulled the car to a stop at the edge of a grassy landing field. Woo leant forward. 'Perfect as always.' He handed over a set of keys. 'Keep the club open – the Black Scorpion are less likely to try anything in public. If anyone asks where I've gone, tell them...tell them I'm on a pilgrimage.'

Rondo nodded grimly as the Doctor got out of the car. Woo paused to help K9 out after him, then followed. He turned back to Rondo. 'If you don't hear from me in three days, there's an envelope with instructions in the safe.' He clapped Rondo on the shoulder, and Rondo covered his hand with his own. 'Yes, I know. Just don't let anyone steal the glasses.'

Woo stepped back as Rondo drove off. Woo wondered if he would ever give the man another order, or indeed ever see him again. He knew that those were vaguely paranoid thoughts, but paranoia was a required qualification for members of the military going undercover in a foreign country. He stuck another toothpick in the corner of his mouth and turned his attention back to the current situation.

The aircraft ahead of them had oddly shaped wings that tapered in from the engines to the fuselage as well as out from the engines to the wingtips. The livery of China's CNAC airline was faded by the lack of light. Woo paused on the grass parking area, brushing his fringe aside. 'What is that piece of junk?'

'A trimotor,' the Doctor said tersely as he strode past.

'I can see that.'

‘The vehicle,’ K9 announced with a faintly lecturing tone, ‘is a Stinson Model A Trimotor, first flown in nineteen thirty-fo-’

‘All right, K9, we don’t need the full service history.’

Woo regarded the Stinson Trimotor more than a little suspiciously. It had neither the solidity of a Junkers 52 or the panache of a Lockheed Electron, but Woo was mostly put out by the fact that the wings appeared to be held on by struts that came down from the top of the fuselage. Three smallish ports were set into the side in the shadow of those disconcerting struts, with a narrow doorway behind them. The twin-blade radial engine on the port wing was already spinning, the starboard and nose engines just spluttering into life. ‘You can’t be serious?’

The Doctor held his hat down with one hand as a gust of wind from the starting engines threatened to blow it off. ‘I’d have preferred a Comet, but that hasn’t been invented yet.’

Woo merely looked at him. ‘If this is the first plane heading north; it’ll have to do.’

* * *

A huge mural ran the length of three of the walls inside the Tiangong, depicting a holy quest, though many of the scenes were obscured by noticeboards and posters.

Hsien-Ko was pointing out the positions for new cable junctions on a map to the engineers when Kwok returned from giving orders about Li. Hsien-Ko looked up as he approached.

He leant on the table to speak into her ear. ‘We’ve received word from Shanghai: the Doctor and Yan Cheh were seen boarding an aircraft bound for Jining. They can only be making their way here.’

‘By aircraft?’ Hsien-Ko echoed.

Kwok nodded. ‘One of CNAC’s Trimotors.’

Hsien-Ko thought for a moment, drumming her fingers.

She had no desire to harm the Doctor, but Woo was dangerous. That one would kill without compunction, she knew. If anything, he was even more dangerous than Li. She couldn’t attack Woo in flight, so he would undoubtedly feel safe on board. Off-hand, she couldn’t think of

a better time to attack than when the enemy felt safest; but how? 'Bring the charts.' Kwok was unrolling a chart with a tight smile before she'd finished the order; he always seemed to anticipate her desires.

The chart displayed a contour map of China's east coast from Hankow to Tientsin. Hsien-Ko traced a line northeastwards from Shanghai with her finger. 'The aircraft will have to detour around the southernmost tip of the hills, yes?'

'As far as I'm aware.'

'Then they'll pass over Lake Weishan at the foot of the hills. Water and mountains make that a perfect gateway for a Dragon Path.'

Kwok nodded, then shrugged. 'I just wondered if you're taking into account the aircraft's altitude. This works well enough on the ground, but...'

Hsien-Ko responded with her typical smile. 'The Dragon Paths will operate anywhere in the Earth's magnetic field, including in mid air. I think that perhaps the recent loss of Amelia Earhardt may be a result of her having flown into one accidentally. Without control, she may well have re-emerged at the bottom of the ocean or entombed in a mountain somewhere. Have the aircraft tracked; I'll want to know its exact speed and altitude.'

Kwok nodded, then hesitated. 'You weren't thinking of going yourself...?'

She shook her head with a smile, touched by his concern.

'I'll be too busy.' She let her eyelids droop, staring off into the distance as she tried to focus her thoughts. 'Sin,' she said aloud, 'Sin! Come to me. I have a task for you.'

Kwok shifted uncomfortably. 'Hsien-Ko...sometimes I'm afraid for you when Sin is here. I don't trust that...thing at all.'

You know the reports: even Weng-Chiang himself could not control it in the end.'

Hsien-Ko was about to tell him his fears were nonsense, but thought better of it. At least he cared, even though his worries were misplaced. That was a comfortable feeling, somehow.

‘Weng-Chiang –’ Was a fool, she wanted to say, but that would have been disconcerting for her troops to hear. ‘Weng-Chiang didn’t understand Mister Sin as my father did. The only danger is in giving him self-control; even then, he is no more than a mechanism left uncontrolled, like a runaway lawnmower. I, like my father, know to keep him under direct control.’

Seventeen

The CNAC Stinson Trimotor occasionally quivered as it passed through an area of turbulence, but for the most part it had been a smooth flight.

Inside, Woo and the Doctor had spread the *feng shui* map over the narrow table between their seats. Woo had long since given up on trying to understand its relevance to the situation, however. 'I suppose you know what the significance of this map is?'

The Doctor nodded. 'It's a kind of geological survey. Very useful if you need a sizeable chunk of crystal-bearing rocks.'

'Crystals?'

'Mm. For energy resonance, or piezoelectric effects.'

It wasn't a term with which Woo was familiar. 'Electrical power from rocks; you can't be serious.'

'Me not serious? Romana's been talking far too much, obviously...' He trailed off, his eyes widening even further than normal. Instantly alert, Woo turned to see what was attracting the Doctor's attention. Ripples of light were spreading across the bulkhead that separated the cabin from the baggage hold. The ripples danced and coalesced in the most astounding manner, brightening as they did so.

Woo hurled himself instinctively to the side as a grotesquely snarling form burst from the trunk and landed on his seat. It was the same leering midget who had been with Hsien-Ko on her junk, and even the Doctor looked on it with loathing. 'Sin!'

K9 extended the gun barrel set into his nose. 'Danger, master, danger.'

'I'd noticed!'

The Peking Homunculus weaved its knife through the air threateningly, but tumbled from the seat as the plane banked on a course change. 'Halt or I fire,' K9 warned.

'No, K9!' the Doctor yelled, but it was too late. A red flash lit up the darkened cabin as K9 tried to get a shot at the Homunculus, but he was sliding downslope as the plane listed and the shot went wild.

There was a muffled cry from the curtained-off cockpit and Woo could smell singed cloth.

Risking a quick look, he saw that the curtain separating the cabin from the cockpit was in flames, the pilot reeling woozily behind it.

The Stinson lurched to port as the pilot slumped over the control yoke and Woo slammed painfully into the corrugated wall of the fuselage. The grotesque automaton's perpetual sculpted leer didn't even twitch as he too clattered across the seats.

K9 slid aside, crashing into the passenger door with a metallic ringing. The door snapped open and the Doctor flung himself forward, looping his scarf around K9's neck before the mechanical dog could slide out. He started pulling the rest of the scarf off his shoulders as K9's traction system tried to get a grip on the edge of the door.

Woo grabbed the Homunculus by the collar and slammed a fist full into its face. His hand felt like he'd punched a brick wall, and he realized too late that the face was solid wood. He thrust the mechanical killer away from him, barely in time to receive an icy line of pain across his forearm as the Homunculus slashed at him with the knife.

The aircraft continued to tilt into a dive, K9 finally toppling out of the passenger door just as the Doctor knotted the other end of his scarf around one of the bolted-down seats. The scarf went taut as K9 dropped away from the plane and he was jerked to a halt when the scarf reached its full length.

The leering Homunculus pushed himself forward at Woo again. But he had misjudged the rate at which the plane was diving, and so Woo was able to duck under his leap. The Homunculus thudded into the smouldering curtain which tore loose from its mounting. Sin and curtain fell in a tangled heap and Woo saw his chance. Bracing himself so as not to share a similar fate, he gathered up the struggling bundle before Sin could extricate himself from it, and clambered over the seats towards the door.

The Homunculus' tiny childlike hand tore through a scorched hole in the curtain, holding a silver glint that lashed out at Woo's face. Woo twisted aside, however, and hurled the bundle forward at the very last moment. Sin flung the curtain aside, limbs flailing in an attempt to catch hold of the rim of the door, but he was too far away.

A lightning flash transforming his carved leer into a grimace of primal

rage, the Homunculus swept past K9 and vanished into the darkness. Woo held onto the chair as tightly as he could. 'Doctor, I think the pilot's dead!'

'Nonsense; he's just stunned, but he'll be out for hours.

Pull in K9.' The Doctor braced himself against the seats to lever himself back towards the cockpit.

'Can you fly?'

'I took lessons from Lindbergh. Someday I'll have to go back and take the part of the course that deals with landing!'

He disappeared into the cockpit. Woo kneeled on the seat nearest the door as the Stinson levelled off, and grabbed hold of the taut scarf. The woollen cable disappeared in the cloudy darkness, but Woo could make out the faint red glow of K9's eyes bobbing around in the slipstream several yards below and beyond the Stinson's tailfin. Refusing to let this somewhat bizarre situation faze him, Woo started reeling in the scarf hand over hand.

Sin didn't scream as he fell; he didn't have enough intelligence to be afraid or to control his larynx. Besides, there was nothing for him to be afraid of.

The locket around his neck flickered with chronon discharges, and he vanished, leaving only a ripple of air to mark his fall.

* * *

Hsien-Ko opened her eyes as Sin dropped to the ground from a few inches in the air. It had been worth a try, but wasn't too important; Yan Cheh was but one man, and she had three thousand troops here.

However, so long as he could be delayed until the Doctor saw the achievement she was making, he would be harmless.

He didn't even need to die in that instance, as the Doctor himself would never allow him to kill someone who certainly wasn't an enemy. She rose from her place at the desk and went out into the main courtyard.

Romana saw Hsien-Ko and followed curiously, wondering what had happened. That something had gone wrong was obvious, so Romana took that to mean that the Doctor and Woo were still safe. The Black

Scorpion leader strode a few paces into the sunlight, pointing to the nearest group of men.

‘You! Take a truck and use the Dragon Path to get to the airfield at Jining. A Trimotor will be bringing in the Doctor and Yan Cheh. Bring them both back here unharmed if they’re willing. If not; deal with Yan Cheh as necessary, but remember that the Doctor is not to be killed.’

The men bowed and hurried off to fetch their weapons.

Romana slipped round the corner, following discreetly. If she could join them without their knowledge, she could get there in time to tell the Doctor what she had discovered so far. She knew that Hsien-Ko meant him no harm, but she obviously had some sort of plan to exploit his knowledge of time travel.

The more the Doctor knew in advance, the better able they would be to make the right move.

Being so tall and aristocratic, Romana couldn’t blend in with them even if she changed her clothes, but there had to be some way...She recalled the arch she had arrived at from the Huangpu. Men on foot could go anywhere, it seemed, but to carry equipment in a vehicle they required a wider Dragon Path, and the arch seemed to be a place where they could get onto one of those limited number of Dragon Paths.

Keeping low, she scuttled across the courtyard and out of the temple complex. The Daizong Archway was a few hundred yards down the street to her right and she hurried towards it. As the Doctor had advised earlier, she didn’t run and hoped that her local garb would dissuade any more distant observers from giving her a second glance.

A truck was already emerging from the temple complex as she reached the archway. Fortunately the scalloped edges and moulded stylistic lions and dragons on the archway afforded excellent hand- and footholds. Ducking round the far side of the arch, Romana hastily scrambled up the side of the arch; not an easy job in the cheongsam’s pencil-skirt.

Somehow she managed it and flattened herself on top of the arch as the truck approached. She seemed to be spending far too much time hanging from high places lately. The truck passed below her, entering the archway, and she dropped the few feet onto the tarpaulin roof that covered the back of it.

It nearly bounced her back off, but she grabbed onto the thin metal supports through the material as she was carried under the arch.

The world twisted.

Romana fell from the roof of the truck, but managed to roll with the fall. She was no longer in the Tai'an street, but on a grassy field a few yards from a couple of parked biplanes. The truck turned in a tight circle and drew up beside a fuel bowser.

Bruised but mostly uninjured, Romana scrambled to her feet and ducked behind the tail of the nearest biplane.

The leader of the Tong soldiers got out of the truck to join his men. The drone of aircraft engines was already audible, and a distant spindly aeroform that was too rigid to be a bird was descending from the thin clouds. 'Spread out. We don't want them to get away.'

His men scattered, readying their weapons, as the Trimotor swooped down towards the grass landing field. One of them suddenly pointed behind the leader. 'Look! It's the woman!'

The leader turned and saw Romana break from hiding and run towards the landing aircraft. 'Grab her! Hsien-Ko wants her kept separate from the Doctor.'

Romana frowned, then lunged forward towards the leader.

He grabbed her by the shoulders, but was surprised to discover that she wasn't, strictly speaking, attacking him. She snatched a hand grenade from his belt and pulled the pin before he realized what was happening.

Now he was stuck with one arm around her throat, while she held the grenade at arm's length. He began to wonder just what she was up to. 'If you want me alive, then I suggest you let go of me,' she told him quietly. 'If I let this grenade go, the safety lever will spring off and Hsien-Ko will have to try to work out which pieces are from which of us.'

The leader began to sweat. He couldn't kill her or Hsien-Ko would kill him. To knock her out, he would have to break free and she would be able to run for it in the three seconds before detonation. Of course, he couldn't trust her not to use the grenade on him or his men if he let her go.

He tried to think of a better solution, but none presented itself. He had almost resigned himself to letting her go, when there was a harsh buzzing from one side. One of his men fell to the ground, though there had been no audible shot, and the others looked behind the leader and Romana with mouths agape.

They raised their guns, and the leader had a sudden premonition that they were going to shoot both him and the girl. He shoved her to the ground in his own dive for cover, while a volley of gunfire swept past him. Another man dropped in a red flash, and the leader rolled to one side.

The men weren't shooting at him, however, but at a strange metal beast that was hurtling across the concourse. It must be the General of the Dog-spirits, the leader thought as he took in its flashing silver body and burning red eyes. A streamer of flame from its mouth knocked another of his men into oblivion. 'Flee!' the leader shouted.

His men didn't need encouragement. They bolted back towards the truck on the dispersal field. Another two of them fell before they reached it, but the leader didn't care about them. Tyres screeching, the truck hurtled off back towards the Dragon Path.

* * *

The Doctor was strolling casually round the corner of the parked aircraft even before the burning hiss of K9's gun had stopped. Woo followed, guns at the ready, and found Romana sitting up in the midst of a number of fallen men.

The Doctor looked at the grenade she was holding. 'Aren't you supposed to have a card with the name of the person you're waiting for?'

'I'll try to remember next time.' She looked around sheepishly. 'You don't see the pin for this lying anywhere nearby, do you?'

Li had been puzzled by the cables which festooned the crystalline bones of the mountain, but had no experience on which to base a guess as to their purpose. For a moment, he thought of cutting some, since if the Black Scorpion wanted them intact then he wanted them severed. He didn't know how much current might be flowing through them, however, and decided against risking electrocution.

If the Tong were still maintaining any pretence of affiliation with the Nationalist government, he reasoned, they must have communications

equipment somewhere. It would have to be outside, since the mountain itself would block any signals otherwise, and probably fairly high. As a result, he sought not to go deeper into the caves, but to find out what was outside every cave mouth.

Most of them had opened onto little plateaux or promontories with small temples or shrines built on them.

Even the ones without temples at least had a wide bowl for burning offerings of prayer money. Most of the outcropping also had .50 calibre machine guns set into beds of sandbags for defence against aerial attack.

Li was becoming discouraged and began to wonder whether the communications room was back down in the Dai temple when he emerged into the grounds of the two-storey Daiding Inn. The Bridge of the Gods was a little way downslope, but between the tunnel and the bridge was something that interested Li more: the Azure Clouds temple, with a little garden of stretched aerals around it.

He covered the distance to the temple in moments, hoping that no one was looking this way from the Jade Emperor's temple across the cutting in the peak. He slipped inside quickly.

Most of the temple was untouched, but one room was blocked off with a door warning against unauthorized entry.

That could only be the room he wanted. A Tong member in a KMT uniform turned as Li entered the tiny office. Li put two bullets in him at point-blank range before he could even rise from his stool, and the body and stool crashed to the floor. Li sat down in front of the array of high-powered radio equipment. The radio was an American one, but bore the white-on-blue starburst insignia of the KMT. Li wiped the blood from the dials of the complex transmitter and started retuning the dials.

Before long, the random spitting of static cleared into a steady hum. 'Wakizashi calling katana. Wakizashi calling katana. Are you receiving, over?'

The town that spread out below the gentle slope was dotted with silver fountains at the heart of small green parks which were scattered around the grey streets. Between the road on which the Doctor, Romana, K9 and Woo stood and the town was a glittering blue expanse of water, with a few fishing junks plying the lake.

Off to the right, along the north shore, rails scarred their way to a low sprawl of utilitarian buildings. From them streamers of steam and smoke rose and even at this distance the mechanical breathing of engines was audible.

The Doctor hopped up to stand on K9's back and curled his hands in front of one eye. 'Aha! I thought as much!'

'What?'

The Doctor looked at his empty hands. 'I've left my telescope in the TARDIS.' He pointed at the columns of steam and smoke instead. 'There she blows! We can't land on the mountaintop in one of those trimotors, but from what Romy – er, Romana – says, we can get there by train.'

'Are you mad? Those will be KMT troop trains filled with Tong members.'

'Oh, I think we can keep out of their way.' He grinned. 'I always thought everyone wanted to drive one of those someday.'

Romana shook her head. 'Not quite everyone, Doctor.

Some of us had more practical ambitions.'

'Yes...To sit around counting stars through the Panopticon roof like every other Time Lord.' He turned to Woo. 'Have you any idea how boring near-immortality is? Eh?'

'Ask Hsien-Ko.'

* * *

The Dazheng Hall was a huge octagonal structure with a coffered ceiling in the Imperial Palace complex in Mukden.

Like the Forbidden City, but on a smaller scale, it was bounded by several courtyards. To the west was the central courtyard with a long low conference hall. In front of the Dazheng Hall's elaborately gilded main entrance were a row of banner pavilions – small offices dating back to the seventeenth century.

The guards that patrolled the courtyards weren't wearing the rough and ready uniforms of the Chinese Nationalists but the earthy garb and steel helmets of the Imperial Japanese Army. The blood-red sun

emblem of Japan flew from every flagpole.

A private had fetched Major Ryuji Matsu from drafting new training schedules, and now the lithe officer swept into the banner pavilion that had been requisitioned as a communications office. A wall of drably painted metal and complex controls faced him as he entered, but a signals sergeant was on duty too. 'What is it?' He hoped it was important: he and his troops had been stationed here in Manchukuo since it was subdued a few years earlier, and things were getting dull now that the Nationalists had pulled the troops off to fight the Communists in the mountainous regions bordering Mongolia.

Technically there was a front line, with the Twelfth Army pushing into Shangdong, but consolidation was the main aim for the moment and resistance was minimal.

'A message, sir, on the Intelligence frequency.'

Interesting, Matsu thought. 'Let me hear.'

The signalman operated some of the controls, and a new voice filled the air. ' *Wakizashi* calling *katana*; are you receiving? Over.'

Matsu grabbed the microphone. ' *Katana* calling *wakizashi*. Receiving you strength three. Over.'

'The Black Scorpion have made an incredible discovery, *katana*. It can be ours if we act now. Recommend you send occupation force to –' There was a sudden explosion of static.

Matsu thumped the radio in anger. 'To where? Get onto the consulate in Shanghai and to Nagasaki. Find out if they picked up that transmission, and if so whether they have a bearing on it.'

Li shook the microphone, then realized that he was sitting in almost total silence. Total, apart from a faint snuffling. He turned, raising his gun, to find Sin watching him with glittering eyes. The main power cable to the radio hung loose, while Sin's hand was blackened, the skin of paint blistered.

Hsien-Ko was only half listening to Ying as he explained how long it would take the reactor to reach a multiplication factor of one – a self-sustaining reaction. She could hear in her mind the echo of Li's voice speaking about occupation forces.

She waved at Ying to be silent, concentrating on what Sin was seeing.

The radio was set not to Kuomintang or even police frequencies, but one of the Japanese military frequencies.

She knew that the Great Circle Tong were devious, but to betray their whole people...No, more likely Li was a lone agent. She filed the thought away for the future; it might make useful leverage in any negotiations with either the authorities or the Great Circle. The thought of the Japanese in possession of the secrets she had been bequeathed was like a charge of electrical terror through her. 'Kill him, now,' she said aloud.

Everyone in the control chamber looked at her, and she turned to Kwok. 'Get to the Azure Clouds Temple with as many men as you can find. Kill Li!'

Li recalled that gunfire didn't do much against the demonic midget, and backed away as Sin approached with a speed that was astonishing for such rigid limbs. He had moved back only a couple of steps when he felt the wall of the temple press against his shoulderblades.

Sin continued to advance past the severed power cable, his hydraulic snorts sounding uncomfortably like the distorted giggles of a child pulling the wings off flies. Li wondered if the creature would be susceptible to the hefty kick he used to knock it aside earlier, but its black eyes gave him the uneasy feeling that it remembered, and was waiting for, exactly that move.

The break in the power cable was behind Sin, but it entered the wall by Li's foot. He snatched it up and lunged forward, holding the end of it like a fencing foil. The tip touched Sin's chest, blowing him back towards the door with a flash and a loud bang.

Not waiting to see how long it would take Sin to recover, Li leapt straight over the sprawled dwarf. He almost wasn't quick enough: Sin rolled to his feet as Li flew past, lashing out with a knife. A line of cold fire sheared across Li's right calf and he had to grab hold of the door to stay upright. Fortunately this meant he could slam the door on Sin.

There was no way for Li to lock the door as he didn't have a key, so he settled for making a limping run back into the cave. Already the pain was beginning to burn and he knew he needed a place to pause and bind the wound. There was a crash behind him. He looked back to see that Sin had exited the Azure Clouds temple and was silhouetted against the cave entrance, wisps of smoke rising from the back of his

head.

Fear for his own survival overriding the pain, Li forced himself to stumble deeper into the tunnels.

* * *

Hsien-Ko woke to find Ying's face gradually coming into focus. What had happened? She had been talking about how slowly to bring the reactor up to power, then...Ah, yes, she had been linked to Sin. Li had hit Sin with a power cable, and – that was it, all she remembered.

'I'm all right,' she muttered with a dry mouth. She pushed Ying away and sat up on the control chamber floor. What had happened to Sin? She closed her eyes, concentrating on matching her brain's alpha rhythms to the frequency of the receiver in Sin's head.

Nothing happened.

She could feel the blood drain from her face very slowly; it felt like toppling very gently into a cold and dark abyss.

The cave mouth by the Jade Emperor temple was the nearest exit from the control chamber, and Kwok's athletic frame took him there quickly. That meant it was faster to reach the Azure Clouds temple by going round the cutting in the eastern peak than by going through the tunnels in search of another exit. A soldier tossed Kwok one of the new German guns as he emerged, and he caught it one-handed.

He wasn't sure what had so upset Hsien-Ko, but he did know that he had never seen her so pale, and that worried him.

There must be a serious problem for her to be so unsettled, and the only clue he had was that it involved that cursed Li. He had feared all along that that policeman would cause trouble, and he wasn't happy to be proved right.

He increased his pace to a run once he had reached the southern ridge that led down to the Azure Clouds temple and the Bridge of the Gods. He burst into the temple at full tilt, ready to empty the whole magazine into anyone he found there. All he discovered, however, was a dead signalman and a radio with its power supply severed. The settings on the radio were odd, though, and definitely not a Black Scorpion or Nationalist frequency – which in this area left only one real choice.

Kwok was disgusted; Li must have been in Shanghai when the Japanese briefly overran it in 1932, so why would he want to aid Japan? Perhaps he had been working for them then, too.

That would be just the sort of thing Kwok might expect from such a dishonourable coward. Kwok had lost several friends that year; he wondered how many more might die as a result of the actions of traitors like Li.

He reminded himself to follow Hsien-Ko's original instructions after killing Li, but with a difference – he would ensure that the body would be delivered to the Emperor's doorstep.

'*Dai lo*,' one of the soldiers called. Kwok turned back to the door, where the soldier was pointing down. 'Look.'

A splash of blood had crossed the doorway and more spots led off towards the cave mouth. So, Li was wounded; Sin's work, Kwok suspected. That would make him slower as well as easier to track.

The soldiers formed up, ready to follow Kwok in search of Li. Cocking the MP38 with his free hand, Kwok marched off towards the cave mouth.

Eighteen

Bohan been an engineer of the railway line since it was laid. The interactions of so many pieces of mechanism to produce one smooth journey was a source of delight to him, and he was very proud of the old engine.

The troops who were the most common travellers on his train now had no appreciation for such mechanical artistry, but at least their philistine existence on the line was restricted to the coaches. Coaches were as much passengers as were the humans inside, Bohan felt.

He looked out along the wooden platform that stretched beside the right side of the train. Most of the troops had boarded, but a few stragglers were moping around on the planks. He sounded the whistle, reminding them that the train was due to leave.

The whistle was so loud that he almost didn't hear the polite metallic knocking from the left side of the train. He turned to see what his fireman was up to and saw him standing nervously with his hands in the air. Three people were looking up at them from between the tracks. A baby-faced man with a shaggy fringe and a tall white woman with a proud demeanour and tumbling dark hair both held handkerchiefs across their faces. A white man with a wide-brimmed hat low across his eyes and one loop of an enormous woollen scarf round his face stood between them. The first man held a gun, while the white man doffed his hat. 'Is this the Tai'an train?'

Bohan could only nod dumbly.

'Ahem, you wouldn't mind if we borrowed it for a while, would you? Only my friends and I don't really have the knack of navigating along telluric currents.'

* * *

Li had found a small pool in a depression, and paused to wash the blood from his leg. The dwarf's knife had barely touched it, yet his calf was open almost to the bone, or so it seemed to him. He marvelled that he could still walk at all, as he tore a strip from his suit jacket to form a bandage. The stolen uniform would just have to fit badly after all.

Once he had tied the cloth, he stood with difficulty and hobbled off in

a new direction. The most important thing was to stop the blood trail that would lead Sin straight to him, and then get out of the area.

Whimpering no louder than the cries of a mouse, he chose a new tunnel and limped down it, his wounded leg trailing behind him.

* * *

Steel piston-arms spun the train's wheels into a dark blur as it arrowed through narrow cuttings in the foothills of the Shangdong massif. The thick smoke billowing from the engine left a sort of fuzzy ghost-trail to indicate the train's recent passage.

The Doctor had hung his coat and scarf on a lever and was watching the steam pressure gauge carefully, while Woo shovelled more coal into the boiler. This wasn't exactly the sort of action he had planned to take against the Black Scorpion – there were people who were paid to do these things. Privately he thought that they should have kept the engine crew aboard instead of leaving them stranded in Jining.

Of course, there wasn't enough room for all of them, but he would have been happy to sit in a carriage for the good of all.

'How long to Tai'an?' Romana asked. She was at the rear of the footplate, holding on for dear life.

'About another forty minutes at this speed,' the Doctor shouted over the noise of the engine. Despite the noise and smoke, he was grinning broadly and obviously thoroughly enjoying himself. 'So long as we don't get the wrong type of leaves on the line.'

Woo looked up from his rather straining efforts. 'What is that supposed to mean?'

'I've no idea; it's just something you say in this business. I think it's some kind of superstitious invocation.' He punctuated the words with a 'so there' nod. 'Did you say that T'ai Shan is where Greel first arrived?'

Romana nodded. 'According to Hsien-Ko. She seems to think we'll approve of what she's doing.'

'So she said. I wonder what she means.'

'Self-justification is a characteristic of trauma-based psychoses.'

‘I think there’s more to it than that. She’s not planning to rescue him at the point of death, you know.’

‘She’s not?’

‘I think she hopes to short out the zygma beam so that he never makes it to 1872. That way her father will survive too.’

‘But she would never become irradiated with chronons; there would be a temporal paradox!’

‘I know. Remember she’s from a primitive age, basing her work on the leavings of someone who was a scientific ignoramus in the first place.’

‘Is everybody you meet like that?’

‘No, no. Some of them are real crackpots.’

K9’s antennae buzzed. ‘Attention. Two aircraft approaching from the north.’

‘Oh, not again!’

Woo straightened. ‘Japanese raiders coming down from Jinan. Hsien-Ko has picked a very dangerous place to carry out her plans – everything north of T’ai Shan is held by the Japanese Twelfth Army.’ After a few moments, he began to make out the distant drone of aircraft engines. It grew rapidly louder, and a few shots crackled from the windows of some of the carriages as the soldiers within opened fire.

The combination of the pounding steam engine and the roar of radial engines at full throttle drowned out any actual sound of gunfire, but the crash of exploding glass panes was warning enough. The Doctor hurled Romana to the floor of the engine as Woo dived for cover.

The attack was over in moments, but it felt more like minutes. The aircraft were very fast, however, and had passed the train in seconds. Woo leant out the side of the engineering space, twisting his head round to try to identify the type of aircraft which had attacked them – if they had a bombload, then the train was in trouble. The planes had flashed overhead and beyond the train, however, so it was a few moments before he saw them peeling round against the clouds to set up another attack run. Both planes glinted silver, with no camouflage, and had wide wings that formed a long ellipse, with a surprisingly small fuselage behind the large radial engine. A small black smudge

on each fuselage was an open cockpit. He looked round at the others. 'Type 96s: Mitsubishi A5Ms. Two machine guns, no bombs.' He looked back out, then returned to the floor. 'Here they come again. This'll probably be the last run – they've sacrificed weapons for speed and manoeuvrability in this model. This is just a nuisance raid, to show that they can do it whenever they feel like it. It's standard procedure to teach respect this way.'

'You seem to know a lot about Japanese equipment and strategy,' Romana called out over the renewed sound of splintering glass and wood. 'Have I missed something?'

'Work experience,' the Doctor suggested.

This time the planes came at the train head on. A cacophony of metallic squeals and howls erupted from the engine's boiler as bullets ricocheted from it, and a couple of small valves cracked open. While the wave of exploding splinters rushed back towards the end of the train, the Doctor cut off those valves, using his scarf to protect his hands from the sharp jets of steam.

The A5Ms peeled off away from the railway line, showing no sign of damage from the sporadically returned fire. Woo leant out from the side of the footplate. 'Yes, they're going.'

'Good.' The Doctor wiped his hands on his scarf. 'They haven't done any real damage. The tricky part will be getting off the train without those soldiers bothering us.'

'I've been thinking about that. Why don't we just jettison the carriages?'

'Aha. Excellent idea. We'll wait until we're nearer town, though, in case those planes come back.'

'They won't,' Woo promised.

* * *

Sin could scent the rich aroma of warm blood amidst the cool rock. It had a welcoming air, promising the pleasure of sustenance. He had no means to consume anything, of course, but the dimmest memories buried in his porcine cerebral cortex remembered how good it felt; how strong it made him.

In thermographic mode, his solid-state eyes could make out the light

spots that were cooling blood droplets on the cold darkness of the ground at the edge of a black stretch of cold water. There were no more drops ahead, but the brightness of these last few indicated that they were more recent. The human wasn't far ahead, he calculated. Soon he could release its blood, and allow himself the luxury of recalling the taste and the strength gained by devouring living matter.

He hoped the presence of the other human mind would stay away while he did so. It had often interrupted this most heartfelt of pleasures, directing his body to take him elsewhere, so that the smell and warmth of the fading life could no longer invigorate him. Now, however, he couldn't feel it at all.

There were distant scuffling sounds from the caverns ahead, but the acoustics of the enclosed spaces made direction-finding difficult. Angle of incidence equals angle of reflection, his targeting systems determined. A series of rapid calculations provided the original source in a microsecond, and Sin moved towards it.

* * *

Kwok silently indicated that the soldiers should spread out among the pillars and buttresses of the expansive grotto.

Sound carried very well down here, what with all the echoes, and he didn't want to risk a stray whisper driving Li further out of sight.

Water dripped in loud plops somewhere outside the cones of illumination provided by the light bulbs, and Kwok stood still so that he could listen without the interference of the sounds of his own movement. The faint sussurations of moving cloth from the soldiers' uniforms and an almost imperceptible electrical hum from the lights were the only sounds in the grotto. The slight chill made his bandaged eye socket throb painfully.

Kwok disliked such places. In one way it was good: it limited the approaches an enemy could make. However, the darkness provided an excellent cloak for a fugitive such as Li.

If he had found the right sort of fissure to hide in, they could walk straight past him and never know it.

There was a faint click from the left, through the forest of glittering pillars. Kwok turned silently on his heel. It could have been a rat or something, but it could also have been a footstep, but all his soldiers were in sight. Kwok flipped open the folding stock of his MP38, and

raised it to his shoulder. He was going to take no chances about this as far as aiming was concerned.

A pale head emerged from the shadow of one pillar about twenty yards away. Kwok's finger was squeezing the trigger before the face even turned to see who was there. A short child-like figure twitched through the air in a shower of sparks, and Kwok ceased firing, the noise echoing for several moments. Damn, he thought, it was Sin. Kwok rarely felt anything approximating fear, but when he did, it was usually in connection with Sin. He had never trusted its loyalty at the best of times, and had no idea how it would react to having a couple of dozen bullets put in it, especially if Hsien-Ko was busy concentrating on the reactor and not on controlling him.

Sin sat up from where he had fallen.

* * *

The first few buildings of Tai'an were approaching rapidly, and Woo looked to the Doctor for confirmation that it was time to separate from the carriages. He couldn't say why he did so; he hadn't looked for instructions from anyone since he left Hong Kong. Perhaps it was because – unlike his superiors then – the Doctor had earned his respect.

The Doctor nodded, so Woo clambered up onto the tender behind the engine and picked his way carefully across the mound of coal and logs. At the rear, he lowered himself into the gap between it and the first carriage. He balanced himself with one foot on the coupling and the other on a thin ledge that surrounded its base.

Hanging on to the edge of the tender with one hand, he stretched down and pushed and shoved at the retaining pin in the coupling until it popped free. The leverage almost toppled him from his perch, but he recovered his balance, pressing himself relievedly against the grimy metal.

The front end of the nearest carriage was rapidly dropping away as it slowed, and Woo rather shakily scrambled back across the tender to the engine. 'We're on our own,' he said, delighted to be standing on a solid footing again.

* * *

Sin's targeting system swiftly worked out the reciprocal bearing for the projectiles that had impacted upon him. A human was there,

holding a weapon which glowed with the heat of recent use.

It wasn't the human whose blood trail Sin had been following, but at least this one was in clear sight. Sin picked up his knife and started marching towards the human, already sensing the joys to follow.

The human opened fire again, the muzzle flashes momentarily causing Sin's vision to white-out, and the dwarf felt himself knocked back against a pillar by a rapid flurry of projectile impacts. There seemed to be no damage, however, and he advanced once more. The human shook his gun, but nothing happened; clearly there were no more projectiles stored within.

The human turned and ran, his thorax and legs brightening slightly in Sin's thermographic vision. Sin felt a surge of excitement as he realized that the human was afraid. Fear enriched the bouquet of the spilled blood, as did recent muscular activity. Hormones that spoke of the legacy of organic life would be released for his reminiscences: adrenalin, norepinephrine, various others that made the scent clearer and the sensation of being alive stronger.

Sin ran.

A dimly lit blur stepped out in his path, firing a weapon at point-blank range. The flashes blinded Sin as he fought to stay upright, but at this range he didn't need to see. A wide sweep with his arm produced a delicious squeal and a cloud of rich smells.

Kwok tossed his empty gun aside and bolted, trying not to hear the rapid footsteps hurtling across the rock floor of the grotto. There was a scream from behind that formed ice crystals in Kwok's spinal column, and he couldn't resist the far too human impulse to turn round.

Sin's sweeping arm had opened up the abdomen of one of the soldiers and a plume of blood and digestive juices sailed between him and the knife. The soldier's gun went off as he fell, blasting the electric lights into the darkness of oblivion.

In deference to millions of years of evolution which said that running about unfamiliar terrain with no way to see what was in front of you was a bad idea, Kwok froze immediately, knowing it was completely the wrong thing to do.

When Sin's vision cleared, not much had changed for him.

The flaming spots high in the cavern were no longer there, and the light levels had dropped, but he could still see perfectly well in the infra-red frequencies.

His target had stopped moving, but several humans were working up adrenalin surges as they converged on the sounds of death. Sin tried to repress a gurgling giggle of anticipation, but to no avail.

This would be a veritable feast.

Footsteps echoed confusingly through the pitch-black cavern and Kwok started to back away slowly. He hoped Sin was equally blinded by the darkness, but he wouldn't like to bet on it. Sound, however, was at least a medium he could try to control, so he moved very carefully.

A warbling scream that seemed like the very sound of life draining away howled through the grotto, then guns started firing. The muzzle flashes stung with their sharpness in the dark, but allowed Kwok to see that he had somehow stumbled into one of the Rounds of the seventh circle of Dante's Hell.

The brief rapid flashes illuminated Sin ripping open a soldier's chest as efficiently as any Aztec priest. Scorched wood chips and gobbets of blood and flesh were blasted from both of them under the gunfire of at least three soldiers.

Because of the briefness and rapidity of the muzzle flashes, Sin's movements were like those of a very jerky old film being played at the wrong frame speed. In this fitful light, he leapt from his current victim, hurling himself at the nearest attacker. Sin's knife glowed redly as it tore into the man's groin. The soldier doubled up, suspended in slow motion by the rapid-fire lighting, to have his throat impaled on the point of the knife.

Kwok's foot nudged a rock as he drew back in horror and Sin's head turned towards the noise, his white-painted leer now the demonic red shade of the blood that gathered in the grooves of his carved face. Laughter that was part childish delight and part swinish grunting swirled around Kwok.

Kwok turned and ran, praying that the spirits of the mountain wouldn't obstruct him with rocks that could trip him.

Li had pulled himself up through a steep fissure to a higher level while any noise he made was covered by the sounds of gunfire and screaming. It had been absolute hell on his arms, but if it saved his life then it would have been worth it. Now slumped against the wall under a curving ramp, he could feel his heart racing; he had the somewhat irrational idea that the sound of it might be magnified by the echo of the caves and draw the traitors to him.

He ignored the irony of his choice of descriptions – Hsien-Ko's betrayal of her superiors for the sake of chaos and anarchy was a far greater crime than his own changing of sides in the name of order. In Japan, everyone knew who was boss and grew up with the habit of obedience ingrained in them.

It used to be like that here in the old days, but not any more. Not while the Nationalists and Communists both tried to impose conflicting edicts. True, things had been even worse twenty years ago when many more warlords had squabbled among themselves, but that didn't excuse the current behaviour.

Ryuji Matsu had recognized that need for order in Li in 1932, and had been gratified by Li's appreciation of the Japanese efficiency. That was when he had suggested the partnership. Japan needed order in China so that trade would be attracted into the region. The sort of indecision that had led to the sanctions put on Japan by Shanghai that year was bad for China too, he had pointed out.

Li could see that for himself: children working in factories or brothels, and coolies merely property of their owners.

Everyone was on a starvation diet except the powers which fought amongst themselves and destroyed the population in the crossfire.

Li had seen the truth of Matsu's words at once, immediately agreeing to help in any way he could. He had heard the stories of atrocities in Manchuria, of course, but as one of the so-called authorities in the city, he knew how much of what the KMT publicized was true on average, so he didn't believe it. He and his wife would be able to live in complete safety once these bandits and their ilk had been subdued, and if it took the Japanese to do what his own government was too uninterested to do, then so be it.

Li realized his mind was wandering; a result of his fear, no doubt. It was an unaccustomed feeling, fear. He wondered vaguely if this was how people felt when he was chasing them.

Did they also identify every drop of water as the footstep of an approaching pursuer? He clenched his fists, digging his fingernails into his palms.

Be calm, he told himself; you are a rational man, not a hunted animal to rely on primal instincts. Reason and determination had seen him through his life so far – they would see him through this, too. That certainty had been drummed into him all through his childhood – usually by force.

A grinding noise drew his notice, and was quickly followed by a set of footsteps on the natural ramp overhead. Li risked craning his neck out from under the ramp, and saw that a man in a thick one-piece hooded suit was descending, walking away down the tunnel.

Li was still weakened, but not so much that he didn't recognize a chance to further disguise himself. With any luck, the advantage of surprise should help him overcome the disadvantage of being wounded. He pulled his gun out from its holster, holding it by the barrel, and crept after the suited man.

A heavy blow to the head was sufficient to knock the man cold, then Li snapped his neck while he was comatose, since a shot would echo all through the mountain. He examined his victim's possessions and found that they included various notebooks and folders, plus a small identity card.

What, Li wondered, was so important that it merited such precautions? Sung-Chi Li would never be allowed to find out, of course, but this man would. His relaxed smile asserting itself for the first time since he arrived at Tai'an, Li pulled the masking hood away from the body.

Nineteen

Hsien-Ko consulted her clipboard; she had to look over the figures two or three times to get over the distraction of wondering what had happened to sever her link to Mister Sin.

She had much important things to do than worry about him.

Well, one much more important thing, anyway; the only thing that she had ever considered important. 'Withdraw the control rods by twenty per cent,' she told the man operating the large levers below the observation window.

He moved one of the levers, needing to use both arms. In the huge cavern on the other side of the glass, winches buzzed into life to raise the six thick metal cylinders out from the shafts drilled through alternating layers of uranium oxide and graphite. The chains attached to the cylinders stretched taut and the topmost foot of each cylinder slowly rose from the water like a small volcanic island.

Hsien-Ko turned back to where Ying was keeping a close eye on the dials and meters that filled the opposite wall. A faint electrical humming was gently filling the air, while the needles on all those dials quivered. 'Power output three kilowatts and rising.' He scribbled a quick calculation on his own clipboard. 'Multiplication factor is zero point one five and rising.'

* * *

The railway line had curved east around T'ai Shan's foothills in its journey north, and was now moving slowly eastwards into the station. The engine was gasping out explosive puffs of smoke and steam as it slowed to a crawl, then stopped to hiss by the main platform. The Doctor shut everything off and leant out to look along the platform.

Woo craned his neck to see as well, expecting to encounter trouble, but in fact none of the bustling soldiers and railwaymen paid them any heed. Instead, they were all busying themselves at their appointed tasks – moving cargo, refilling boilers, or whatever.

The Doctor quickly donned his hat, coat and scarf, and carried K9 off the footplate. Woo and Romana followed. The Doctor was shading his eyes with his hat as he looked up at the mountain which loomed over the rooftops to the north.

‘You’re the one who’s been here already,’ the Doctor said to Romana. ‘So where are we going?’

‘Most of the cave entrances seem to be near the peaks. It’s about a five-mile walk from here.’

‘We should manage that in a couple of hours. Come on.’

‘What about blending in?’ Woo asked. ‘We’re not likely to be welcome here.’

The Doctor shrugged. ‘They’d only take us to Hsien-Ko anyway, so what difference does it make?’

‘That thing in the plane was sent to kill us.’

‘I doubt that; more likely it was sent to kill you, or possibly to try to delay us.’

‘Me?’

‘Yes; well, Romana and I have scientific knowledge that she wants, while you have a tendency to shoot at her friends all the time. I warned you no good would come of that.’

‘Then what do you suggest?’

‘I suggest you head back to Shanghai where you’ll be safer. Hsien-Ko doesn’t seem to mean Romana or me any harm, which is a nice change, but I can’t have you getting yourself killed following us.’

‘Nothing changes faster than Tong loyalties. I think you and Romy would be safer with me along.’

Romana shook her head. ‘That’s really not necessary.’

‘I didn’t come all this way for nothing. There is that dwarf, for one thing. I owe it a few cuts.’

‘Yes,’ the Doctor muttered. ‘She might think she can control it, but I don’t know how long for. One rule – no killing.’

Woo wasn’t sure how to manage such a feat while in combat, short of getting killed himself. Then what would Rondo do, he wondered. Rondo wasn’t really suited to the diplomacy of running a nightclub in the city. He cursed himself for letting himself get distracted by thoughts of the club again, but he realized he had never been away

from it like this before. It was taking over his life. 'I'll see what I can do.'

* * *

Sin shook a piece of slippery offal from the point of his knife and looked around. There were no more live humans in the vicinity, he noted with dismay. That was the trouble with feasting on human fear and death; they were so easy to kill that it was over almost before it had begun.

Cooling heat trails led out of the cave in two directions. He wasn't sure which was which, but then he noticed the faint particulate blood trace that hung around one of them. It was an encouraging discovery.

Sin set off towards that trail.

* * *

Kwok had run out of breath after a short distance and tried not to listen to the screams. He wasn't sure which was worse: the screams themselves or the silence once they had stopped. At least the silence enabled him to hear Sin moving off in the opposite direction, his tinny footsteps sounding like blood dripping into a brass bowl.

He wondered why Hsien-Ko had been unable to stop it.

Was she all right? He had once tried to imagine life without her, but couldn't get beyond the idea that he would simply die along with her. Anything else was too painful to imagine. He knew that he was being morbid, but something about these caves made that inevitable, especially with the newly dead who had just taken up permanent residence there.

Kwok steadied himself. He was a warrior, an officer of the Black Scorpion. Fear was something he should inflict upon others, not suffer himself. Now that Sin was gone, the first order of business would be to see whether any of the men were still alive.

He tried to reassure himself that there was no need to invoke harm to Hsien-Ko to explain Sin's behaviour. Not only was she busy with the reactor, but Sin's mechanisms had probably been damaged by severing the power cable in the communications room. He had looked a little scorched in places.

Steeling himself, Kwok pulled a flashlight from his pocket and

switched it on. With every step, he half expected Sin to leap out at him, sending his blood spraying through the air to cool as it fell.

The beam of the flashlight cast shadows that were distorted enough as it was without the added horrors of the shapeless mounds of glistening tissues that steamed slightly where they had been exposed to the air. As far as Kwok could tell, everyone was dead and Sin was gone.

The next question was whether Li was one of the dead. He went round each body in turn, trying not to get anything that had oozed onto his boots, but nowhere was the lanky and balding policeman.

Shaking his head, Kwok went to examine the junction box at the entrance to the grotto. He would have to repair the cables quickly if Hsien-Ko's plans for power coverage were to be fulfilled.

* * *

The cadmium control rods had now been pulled more than halfway out of the water in the reactor cavern, and Hsien-Ko could see that most of the meters were reading at least three-quarter power. 'Multiplication factor of point eight zero zero and holding,' Ying announced. That was good, but not good enough; the reaction would not be self-sustaining until each neutron released precipitated exactly one successive fission.

Any less and the reaction would slow to a halt, while any more than one would eventually lead to an explosion.

Hsien-Ko was a little uncertain. She knew that in the future there would be instruments capable of measuring such tiny discrepancies, but she wasn't sure whether the equipment she had stolen from laboratories all over the world was good enough in this era. To have come so far only to back out at this late stage, however, would be a sure way to invite a forcible and fatal retirement. The Tongs did not take signs of weakness lightly. If the equipment wasn't good enough...A quick death would be preferable to living without having achieved her aim.

'Pull the control rods completely.'

The man operating the levers heaved on them once more, and the metal cylinders were dragged slowly from the reactor pile and clear out of the water. 'Control rods are out.'

When the telephone on her desk rang, Hsien-Ko lifted the receiver, not

grateful for the interruption. 'Yes?'

'This is the railway station,' the voice announced self-importantly. 'The troop train expected from Jining didn't arrive, but the Doctor, Romana and Yan Cheh have debarked from the engine.'

'You say it didn't arrive, but –'

'The engine arrived, but with no carriages –' There was a brief commotion and a heated exchange of voices at the far end of the line. 'I've just been told that the engine separated from the carriages and left them stranded about a mile south-east of town.'

'Very well.' She put the phone down, then lifted it. Her hand paused over the dial while she looked back to Ying.

'Well?'

Ying was frantically scribbling formulae on his clipboard, an excited expression on his usually calm face. 'Multiplication factor of one, and holding. Power output now fifteen thousand kilowatts,' he breathed.

Hsien-Ko drummed her fist on the desk, unable to resist the childish impulse to display her own tense excitement.

'Stabilize it. Keep a close watch on the multiplication factor; if it rises by even one per cent, lower the control rods back in by ten per cent.'

'Shall I start transferring power to the primary coil?'

'Not yet. I want to see how stable this is going to be.' She stood. 'Continue monitoring the reaction while I go and greet our new friends.'

* * *

Li had followed the concrete ramp back to its source. Two armed guards were standing outside a thick concrete wall that blocked off a whole section of the caves. Li had been wary, but the guards simply glanced at his pass and opened the heavy steel doors that were indented into the wall.

A small antechamber inside the doors held a small office for the guards and a weapons locker. Li still had the Browning, but it was good that there were other weapons available should he need them. He continued through the inner doors.

Inside was a wide concrete chamber, containing three large concrete cylinders which whirled with the passage of air through the turbines within. Gleaming ducts formed fences across the floor to a bus-sized mechanism of pipes and tubes.

Temperature gauges were attached to it here and there, the differences in the temperatures of various pipes identifying the mechanism to Li as a heat exchanger of some kind. The roof was a good thirty feet high, with the uppermost ten feet of the wall on the left being an overhanging glass wall showing a control room behind it.

Masses of thick cables disappeared into tunnels drilled through the walls, and it seemed reasonable to assume that this was the source of the cables which were threaded throughout the interior of T'ai Shan.

Clearly this was some sort of electricity generating plant, but of what kind and for what reason, Li couldn't say. Perhaps, though, if he watched the other technicians, he might get some clue as to what was really going on.

* * *

Woo had felt permanently uncomfortable throughout the walk through Tai'an. The soldiers all around must know that he and the Doctor and Romana were enemies, and only the gods knew what they thought of K9.

Despite this certain knowledge, no one had stopped them or taken any action against them. They did, however, stop to stare at the newcomers with interest, and Woo began to get the idea of what it must feel like to be a westerner in China. Such staring crowds were things he had seen surrounding westerners on many occasions, as most Chinese had never seen a European. It was most unnerving.

At least in Japan, where foreigners were considered lowlier than peasants, they were too polite to stare like that. The Doctor, of course, took it in his stride, as he seemed to take everything in his stride. 'Doesn't this bother you?' Woo asked.

'So long as they're not shooting, nothing bothers me. Where to, Romana?'

'That arch up ahead.'

Beyond the archway, the mountain rose out of the fertile earth, the line of steps clearly visible, like a zipper. Woo's eyes were drawn back

to the archway. Several people were standing there, and all but one were armed. The exception, as he could tell from the white overcoat which wrapped her lithe but feminine figure and tied-back hair, was Hsien-Ko.

She stepped forward to greet them with a cheery smile as they reached the archway. 'Welcome. I'd been getting worried that you had encountered some trouble en route.'

'Nothing a few years' holiday wouldn't cure,' the Doctor responded equally cheerily. He strolled over to the nearest of Hsien-Ko's guards, extending a hand. 'How do you do; I'm the Doctor, this is Romana and that's Yan Cheh. Where are you from, soldier?'

'Hebei.'

'Aha. Never been there myself, but I hear it's very nice at this time of year.' He turned back to Hsien-Ko. 'Prisoners?'

'Not at all. I just wanted to greet you personally. I understand the train was attacked and since we're only a couple of miles from Japanese-held territory, I want to know I have people I can rely on.' Woo couldn't help feeling a twinge of irony. If only she knew. The words didn't quite ring true, though, but he couldn't tell just what it was that made him think so. 'I imagine you will want to see what I'm up to. I think it's time that you did.' She held out a hand each to the Doctor and Romana. 'As you know I need no Dragon compass. I will take you directly to the peak.' The Doctor and Romana exchanged a look. Then the Doctor shrugged, and they both took hold of one of Hsien-Ko's hands. Hsien-Ko looked at Woo. 'I do, of course, have only two hands. The sergeant here will bring you along.' She stepped forward and vanished, along with the Doctor and Romy.

So that was it, Woo thought, he was the one who wasn't required alive, so doubtless the guards were indeed here to take him prisoner. Before he could do anything about it, however, two of them had grabbed him by the shoulders, adjusting the geomantic compass they shared between them.

They dragged him forward and the mountain view ahead wrapped itself around his head.

* * *

K9 hadn't a chance to do anything to stop the others being removed. He was unsure why they hadn't taken him too; most likely their

primitive minds didn't understand what he was.

The low-level chronon bursts which had accompanied the vanishments suggested that they had not gone far, so K9 calculated that a journey to the summit of the mountain as promised would provide a roughly similar energy displacement.

It just meant that he would have to go the long way. He followed the road through the archway until he reached a quite compact temple which stretched a red gate across the road.

Beyond the gate, the road transformed into a steep pathway with many sections of steps.

If K9 had a heart, it would have sunk, as the radar pulse he sent out was reflected off some seven thousand steps.

Nevertheless, he had a duty to his master. When he reached the first step, his casing lifted up from around his traction system, giving him a good foot of clearance for his forward sprocket wheels to slide onto the top of the step.

Slowly, and with a great deal of whirring, K9 began to climb the mountain of T'ai Shan.

Twenty

The Doctor and Romana stumbled dizzily, overcompensating for the fact that they had moved without taking more than an illusory step. Romana recognized their surroundings as the grounds of the Jade Emperor temple. Hsien-Ko released their hands and started walking towards the cave mouth, but the Doctor had turned to admire the view.

Romana had nothing against admiring beautiful scenery, but there was a time for everything. The Doctor pointed. ‘Ha!

So that’s what you’ve done with it.’ Romana followed the line of his arm, and saw the TARDIS standing against the red-brick wall of a huge gateway.

Hsien-Ko turned back. ‘Your Time Cabinet has not been tampered with.’

The Doctor snorted rudely. ‘You mean you couldn’t get in.

That lock’s a good deal more sophisticated than that old trionic lattice that Weng-Chiang’s zygma cabinet used.’

Hsien-Ko bowed graciously. ‘Come. I will show you what I have achieved here, and why. Then we will be friends.’ She smiled eagerly. Romana was more than a little curious, though showing it was beneath her, but fortunately the Doctor had no such qualms. His mouth twisted in that facial shrug of his and he strolled towards the cave, hand in pockets. He stopped suddenly. ‘Where’s Woo?’

‘Safe. He has killed or injured a number of my troops, and I don’t want anyone getting any misplaced desires for revenge.’

Her mouth quirked slightly.

‘And K9?’

‘K9?’ Hsien-Ko puzzlement was reflected as blatantly in her voice as in her expression.

‘Yes, K9. He’s about so high –’ the Doctor bent to hold the palm of his hand about two feet off the ground ‘– silver, wags his tail and talks too much.’

Hsien-Ko's expression cleared. 'That metal thing that was with you?'

'Exactly.'

Hsien-Ko shrugged. 'I'm very sorry, I thought he was merely a child's toy. For riding on, yes?'

'A child's toy? You'd better not let him hear you say that. Well, what are we all waiting around here for? Haven't you got some diabolical secret to show us?'

'Oh, that?' Hsien-Ko smiled wryly. 'This way.' She led them into the cave mouth.

Romana caught up with the Doctor, leaning in close in the hope that Hsien-Ko wouldn't hear her. 'What did she mean, Woo is safe?'

'Protective custody? He's probably in danger, but he can look after himself.'

'What about K9 then? We can't leave him stuck at the foot of the mountain.'

'I made a few improvements to Professor Marius' design.'

She had met the original at home on Gallifrey, where it had become quite a celebrity, but stairs were something it couldn't cope with. 'It'll take him hours, but he'll get here.'

Hsien-Ko led them only a short distance into the peak, then brought them to a concrete wall containing a steel door. Two armed guards stepped aside to let her pass, and she held the door open for the Doctor and Romana.

The two Time Lords entered the room beyond curiously, and, in Romana's case, with some well-hidden trepidation.

'Welcome to our control room,' Hsien-Ko announced proudly.

The Doctor and Romana looked down on the room below first. 'Heat exchanger and turbines,' the Doctor muttered. 'Put it together with radioactive materials on Hsien-Ko's KMT junk and what do you get?'

'That?' Romana pointed across to the thicker glass opposite. They moved over to look through it. Romana traced the lines of the cables and suspended cylinders with her eyes.

'It looks like a primitive water-cooled fission reactor, judging by the layout. Surely this civilization can't be so advanced?'

The Doctor tilted his hand in a so-so gesture. 'The first reactor was built under a Chicago sports stadium in 1942.'

'Five years from now.'

'Yes.'

'But those cylinders do look like control rods or fuel rods.'

She looked at the Doctor sharply. 'Could they be trying to produce plutonium?'

'I don't see them getting weapons-grade material out of this set-up. Besides, why come to this precise location if that's all they were doing? They could have done that at Hsien-Ko's house or the quarry. They wouldn't need those turbines for that either. No, they want the energy generated.'

'To boost the telluric current in the Dragon Paths?'

'Yes. They seem to be expecting Magnus Greel's return, and the only way to arrange that is to reach back through time and short out the zygma beam.'

'They can't do that with the output of one reactor. Perhaps if they could convert the energy into reverse tachyon chronons...'

'Greel wouldn't have been familiar with that idea, so I doubt that Hsien-Ko could be. If they could alter the electrical frequency of the telluric currents to that of zero-point energy, they'd have a self-sustaining power source that's more than strong enough.'

'Zero point energy? The vibrational frequency of the universe? How could they do that?'

The Doctor looked around, a somewhat surprised expression on his face. 'I'm not sure.'

* * *

Woo stumbled as the mountain wrapped itself around his head, drawing him in. Lights flashed in front of his eyes and soon snapped up into the position light bulbs should normally hold in a human's viewpoint.

He, the sergeant and the two guards were standing in a guardroom like a million others in the world. A row of barred cages lined one side, while a few chairs surrounded a table and a small stove on the other. The sergeant removed Woo's Colts and dropped them on the table, while another guard went to open a cell. Woo wished he could be surprised. 'I take it my life expectancy has been substantially reduced?'

'Maybe, maybe not. Hsien-Ko will decide later, but she doesn't like killing.' The sergeant snorted disparagingly.

'Only Japanese.' Oddly, this reassured Woo slightly. So long as they didn't know who he really was, he was probably safe.

'She wants to take Manchuria back for a start.' Woo was interested at once. Since the taking of Manchukuo had been the Sakura Kai's idea, they wouldn't be pleased to have it retaken by China.

The other guard opened the cell door. 'In you go.'

'Actually,' Woo said, with a look of supreme – if feigned – apology, 'I'd rather not.' He drew the *katana* from his back and swung it at the sergeant's head. Recalling what the Doctor had said about killing, however, he struck with the flat of the blade, stunning the sergeant, then rammed the hilt back into the jaw of the guard at the cell door.

The last guard had unslung his rifle, but Woo slammed the *katana* into it before he could fire, and knocked the steel barrel up into the guard's face. There was a wet crack, and the guard toppled over, as unconscious as the others. Woo thought about that as he took his Colts from the table and slipped the *katana* back into its scabbard. This no-killing stuff did have an interesting challenge of its own, he had to admit.

He slipped cautiously out of the guardhouse, which was on a landing a short distance below the red-brick gateway that stretched across the split peak. There was a very rectangular cave mouth on the next landing up, and Woo recalled that Romana had told himself and the Doctor that most of the important stuff was underground. Since he didn't know where the other entrances were, that was as good a place to start as any.

Nobody was around as he ascended to the next landing, and he was grateful that it was August, three months after the pilgrimage season had closed. This business would be much harder with ten thousand pilgrims clogging the steps.

Hsien-Ko had listened to the Doctor and Romana's conversation with interest. As she had suspected, their knowledge was far in excess of that of Weng-Chiang or herself. If they were to help her refine her discoveries, however, they would have to know more. 'You know what a tuned resonance circuit is, Doctor?'

'It's a very primitive method of energy transmission that works like a step-up transformer.'

'Primitive by the standards of yourself or Magnus Greel, perhaps, but the best we can do today. The principle is simple enough. High-frequency electrical pulses applied to a primary coil will produce massively inflated pulses in a secondary coil.'

The Doctor ruffled his hair. 'Nikola Tesla developed the idea at the turn of the century. He thought he could tap zero-point energy by setting up a standing wave that would resonate at a suitably high frequency. His facility at Colorado Springs burnt out when he tried it.' He smiled apologetically.

Hsien-Ko nodded. 'Tesla's own attempt to tap this energy failed because the generators of the local power company couldn't supply enough current. We don't have that problem. I have had this reactor built based on notes and documents left by my father who took them from Weng-Chiang, or Magnus Greel, if you prefer. Those of us in this room all know he was no god. It will provide sufficient power to cause the secondary coil to resonate at the frequencies used by Greel's zygma beam. The zygma energy will be leached away from the beam through induction and re-broadcast across the Dragon Paths, with the magnetic field of the earth acting as a tertiary coil to further boost output.'

'And then?'

'Two things. One, the zygma beam will terminate here, and not in 1872. Second, the Dragon Paths will be far more powerful; strong enough to pierce the veil of Time.' She looked at him, willing him to understand what she was offering. 'Then, I can save this country, Doctor. The Japanese need never have invaded Manchuria. Millions of lives can be saved. You are known to have an abhorrence of war – yes, I have tracked your exploits over the years – so you must see how we can use the Dragon Paths to put right all those things.'

And then Kwok and I...We shall explore; see what life offered us in the

greatest eras.’ She thought about it warmly. I shall run with dinosaurs, and breathe the air not yet tainted by man.

‘We might just decide to be Adam and Eve.’ She was only half serious.

The Doctor shook his head wearily. ‘I thought you had been thinking along those lines. You’ll never do it. Don’t you see? Tesla’s set-up was seventy-five feet in diameter and two hundred feet high. To generate the sort of power you’re talking about and transmit it into the Dragon Path network, your generator coils would have to be...’ He trailed off, as if unable to think of a suitably impressive word.

‘Mountainous?’

‘Well yes, that’s a good desc–’ The Doctor’s face fell. ‘Ah. Mountainous?’

Hsien-Ko nodded. ‘The piezoelectric properties of the rock?’

‘Very good, Doctor. My father’s earnings and contacts – and my own extended life-span – have allowed me to gain the best education available. Even now, it isn’t yet complete, for all of one’s life is a learning experience. However, I have learnt of the conductive properties of the crystalline deposits found in certain rock formations, such as we have here. The crystals in these rocks will carry an electric current as efficiently as copper wiring – if you can stimulate them properly, and we can.’

‘And then you won’t get the safe exploration and humanitarian exploits you want. You’ll get the nasty truth of the Blinovitch Limitation Effect, which says you can’t change history. Hsien-Ko, don’t you see what will happen if the zygma beam terminates here? You would never have been irradiated with chronons while in the womb. You would never have come to rule the Black Scorpion, or built all this.’

‘That’s what they said about Greel! They said man couldn’t travel through time in the zygma beam, but he did. You can’t trick me, Doctor.’

‘You’re already tricking yourself. Greel was a scientific incompetent who got lucky; you can’t trust that precedent. The paradox would produce a temporal embolism centred on you, and the world would be stuck in an alternate timeline with Weng-Chiang to rule it.’ The Doctor’s voice was thick with disgust.

‘Let Weng-Chiang rule?’ Hsien-Ko laughed. ‘No, no, Doctor; how long would it be before it was my turn for his death machine?’ The laughter drained from her face, leaving a grim mask of hatred as she leant closer. ‘He dishonoured my father, then abandoned him to die.’

‘You must have loved him very much to go to these lengths to avenge him.’

Hsien-Ko’s hesitance masked the hatred. ‘I hardly knew him. Weng-Chiang dragged him off on his wild-geese chase around the world soon after I was born. He used to write often, though, until I was sixteen. Then the letters stopped. Weng-Chiang stole my father from me, enslaved him and discarded him like table scraps. I’m not going to let the little matter of his being dead stop me from avenging my father.’

She straightened. ‘I have the blueprints for his organic distillation cabinet and have modified the design slightly, thanks to the very comprehensive notes left to me by my father. It will absorb the life energy of any being down to the smallest mammal. Oh, it will keep Magnus Greel alive – barely – fed by the occasional rat or vole; no more than that.’

She smiled icily, her eyes focusing on some slightly distant point. ‘And he will live as I wish him to: trapped for all eternity in the prison of a body held constantly at the moment of death. Immortal, and in perpetual agony as his tortured flesh twists and writhes on the bones.’ Her breathing became more shallow and she fell silent for a moment. ‘If I so desire, and if it amuses me, I could inflict any torture upon him that the human mind can conceive – and keep him alive to savour every moment, no matter how much damage is wrought upon his body.’

‘You must be very proud,’ the Doctor muttered darkly.

She snapped back a calm demeanour. ‘No, I’m not. I hate what I’ve become because of Greel. Surely you of all people understand that Greel must be formally punished. Isn’t that what you yourself would have wanted?’

‘Greel paid the price for his lack of responsibility. Cellular collapse isn’t a very pleasant fate.’

‘It’s not good enough!’ Hsien-Ko slammed her fist onto the tabletop to punctuate her opinion. ‘Dead he is but a martyr to the sheep who followed him. Most of these fools still believe he was a god, granted

divine providence to rule, with them as his chosen ones. Look at me: young and beautiful? So people tell me; it's a gift from Weng-Chiang, according to the believers.' Her eyes moistened as she continued in a snarl.

'Sterile and with a future of watching everyone I love age and die? Is that a gift? Doesn't Magnus Greel deserve to be shown for the twisted and debased creature he was, instead of revered as a sadly missed leader?'

'Greel was convinced of his own justifications for mass murder and scientific lunacy, and you're doing exactly the same thing. If you short out the zygma beam, you will alter everything that your life has touched in any way.'

Hsien-Ko went white with anger. To compare her to the vile creature who had inflicted such pain on her was beyond forgiveness. 'No! You should understand. You know what Greel was; you should be standing with us!' Why was the Doctor taking this attitude? It was he who caused Greel's death, after all.

'Understand? I understand all right. I understand that single-minded obsession is one of the human species' most dangerous traits. You've murdered, stolen and perverted the laws of nature just to satisfy the obsession of redeeming your own self-pity; how can you ask me to cooperate with that, eh?

Even without the anachronistic knowledge passed on by your father, you have one of the finest intellects in the world in this era, and you squander it on a "misplaced desire for revenge".'

Hsien-Ko was stunned into silence. After all the reforms she had made in the Black Scorpion and the friendship she had offered the Doctor and Romana, he had the gall to accuse her like this. Did he not see how she had to do this to honour her father? Probably not; he was just a barbarian *gwai lo* after all.

'Out!' she screamed. The guards looked at each other. 'Get these two out of my sight!'

'Where to?' one guard asked nervously.

'Just take them to the guard-room cells. I'll think of a fate for them later.' If Sin doesn't get them first, she thought. She turned to Ying, who flinched at her expression. 'Has the reaction continued to be stable?'

‘Yes. Multiplication factor remains one precisely. Power output now fifteen thousand kilowatts.’

The news calmed her, though she could still feel the veins throbbing in her head. The Doctor would see things her way eventually. First, though, she must go through with it. ‘Switch power through to the primary coil.’ Ying nodded, and turned to the instrument banks to redirect the current generated by the reactor through the cables that webbed the caves and into the crystalline structure of the rock itself.

* * *

Sin was no longer in the caverns. He had moved towards an area which had a slightly greater warmth. Both his strategy subprocessors and his swinish instincts suggested that any humans in the vicinity would be attracted to the heat even if they weren’t the cause of it.

A cooling body lay a short distance from a stone ramp; Sin reached out a hand to gently stroke the cold flesh. He pressed harder with his moulded fingers, not feeling the skin split and tear, but seeing the white-painted fingers sink more deeply in.

His fingers come out red and glistening, but the blood did not flow in the way that it did when fleeing a living body and taking life with it. This human had been stolen from him, but its presence was an appetizer, teasing his desires.

Flicking the cold blood off his fingers, Sin marched up the ramp and turned a corner to find two live humans waiting for him. Their heat-traces shifted discreetly as they saw him and they moved on the spot, trying to bring weapons to bear on him. Sin lunged at the nearest, lashing out with eager delight.

A spray of light, quickly cooling to dark droplets, erupted from the human as Sin’s knife opened an artery.

The human started to fall, his heat pattern blurring with rapid changes, and Sin impaled the central bright spot. The human stopped struggling, but his companion was able to fire his weapon. The projectile hit Sin in the back, pushing him face-first into the darkening centre-mass of his first victim.

Sin turned with inhuman speed, knocking aside the second guard’s gun before it could fire again, and swinging the knife into the human’s arm. Misty light sprayed across the human as Sin opened the inside of his arm from elbow to wrist. A backhanded tear sent more tendrils of

warm light stretching for the floor.

Sin shook himself free of the clinging pieces of flesh and turned to the door. He started looking for an opening mechanism.

* * *

Li was considering what he could do with the controls to sabotage the Tong's plans, but the arrays of gauges, dials and switches on the boards attached to the mechanisms here were beyond anything he had seen before. They all measured temperature or pressure, and – in the case of the turbines – speed, but which controls would affect which mechanisms in which ways was a total mystery.

'You,' someone called. Li ignored it, assuming the man was calling to someone else. A hand spun him round. 'You!

What are you doing at this station, Lung? Get over to the coolant pumps and give me the pressure readi–' The man leant in closer, his eyes peering in through the transparent eye-slit in the hood of Li's suit. 'You're not Lung! Who –'

Li produced the Browning from the folds of his suit and shot the supervisor, who slid into the wall of the nearest turbine housing. The other technicians immediately threw themselves behind whatever piece of machinery they were closest to.

One brave soul, more foolhardy than the others, leapt up to try to wrestle the gun from him. The man was strong and Li's leg was weakening, but Li was trained for this sort of thing.

He was able to unbalance the man and shoot him. By this time, however, someone else had made it to the door, no doubt to call the guards outside.

Li turned at the sound of the door, ready to fire again, but he didn't have to. The unfortunate technician was already folding up as Sin marched into the room, making a beeline for the nearest technician. Li suddenly forgot about sabotaging the power supply; that dwarf had to be dealt with first.

A couple of technicians tried to pull Sin off their comrade, but this only made it easier for him to turn on them too. Blood squirted across the concrete floor as Li dashed past the struggling combatants and into the antechamber.

Not surprisingly, the guards outside were lying in sticky pools of clotting blood, but the weapons locker was untouched. Li pulled the key from the belt of one of the guards, ignoring the red slime that coated it, and unlocked the cupboard. Inside were not just pistols and Thompsons but also pistol grenade launchers – German *Kampfpistolen*.

He looked back into the turbine chamber, horrified to see that Sin was now halfway through the chamber. Worse still, he had turned to look back up at Li. Sin had been grotesque enough to start with, but his face was now red and black with dried blood, like some tribal mask.

* * *

Two armed guards had escorted the Doctor and Romana from the control room, leading them down towards the grotto. This was where most of the cables had been, Romana remembered.

‘Interesting,’ the Doctor murmured. ‘The whole mountain is filled with this stuff.’

‘Yes, and as soon as that reactor comes on line, power will start resonating through the crystals in continuous feedback until it reaches the critical frequency, and then –’

‘Then zero-point energy. I don’t think humans are ready for zero-point energy, do you?’

‘Not yet, no.’ They were dangerous enough, she thought, without being able to tap the potential energy of the universe itself. The term had been coined because it was energy that would still be present even in conditions of absolute zero; it hinged on the fact that the universe itself had a unique kinetic vibrational frequency.

‘I don’t think so either.’ He nudged her and she wondered what he was up to now. She turned to deliver a put-down and saw him roll his eyes, as if pointing with them. She followed the look. A narrow sloping shaft opened up a few feet ahead.

Light from a tunnel in the lower level formed a spot on the ceiling of this one. Romana nodded, covering the movement with a cough for the benefit of the guards.

As they approached, the Doctor turned casually to the guards behind them. ‘I hope you don’t mind me asking, but where exactly are you taking –’ He pointed behind them. ‘Ye gods, man!’ he bellowed. The guards didn’t so much turn as jump round, at which point Romana

and the Doctor leapt into the shaft. It was only about nine or ten feet deep and had a sandy floor, but Romana was jarred to the bone by the impact of landing.

Still, at least she wasn't stupid enough to twist her ankle, she thought proudly. The Doctor clutched her shoulder with an agonized expression. 'Romana, I think I've twisted my ankle.'

He sounded quite offended.

She gave it a quick once-over. 'Just a sprain.' He was such a baby, really. 'Never mind that now.' She dragged him into a pitch-black alcove and put a hand over his mouth to stifle his complaints. The guards jumped down into this new tunnel and looked around. If they checked the floor, they would find the footprints leading straight to their hiding-place, but she hoped the darkness would hide that.

The guards looked at each other. 'They have gone that way. It leads away from the cells.'

His partner shook his head. 'Maybe that's what they want us to think. Besides, they don't know that. If we hurry we can still catch them...' Their voices faded as they wandered off down the tunnel. Romana and the Doctor stepped out of their hiding-place, looking up at the shaft. 'Well, we certainly can't climb back up,' Romana commented.

'No, but we might as well try to find a way out of here. I think it's very important that we be up there.' He limped along the corridor. 'This is totally unfair, you know.'

'Oh, stop whining. It's hardly a scratch.'

'Do you mind? I'm the one who's supposed to say that.'

'Say it then.'

The Doctor cleared his throat. 'Doctor, stop whining; it's hardly a scratch.' He paused. 'I don't believe me.'

Twenty-One

Li couldn't think of a rational and reasoned response to Sin.

The brain's default settings – ancient survival instincts handed down in the human genome since the days of sabre-toothed tigers – stepped in to fill the mental void. Li grabbed a *Kampfpistole* with a *Panzerwurkorper* LP 42 grenade from the arms locker, and swung it towards Sin, firing from the hip.

Surely an anti-tank round would finish it, Li hoped.

The armour-piercing grenade streaked across the turbine chamber, leaving a faint smoke trail in its wake. Sin was already moving, however, and Li could see by the direction of the smoke trail that the grenade wasn't running true. He hurled himself to the ground as the grenade slammed into the heat exchanger.

There wasn't that much flame, but the blast was directed in through the casing of the heat exchanger, shattering its structure. A microsecond later, the superheated steam within burst free and the whole block of machinery exploded in a cloud of steam and shrapnel.

Sin was blown clear across the pumping station by a wavefront of steam that was as solid as any white-top in the sea. Dense white clouds of hot vapour billowed out to fill the turbine chamber and Li had barely got to his feet before he began to feel uncomfortably hot. In seconds he was sweating so much that his hands and feet slipped around inside the gloves and boots, while his temples throbbed.

The lights went out with a bang as the vapour shorted them out, but were quickly replaced by red emergency lights. The steam was thicker than any fog Li had ever been in, and its new red tint made him feel even hotter.

He wouldn't have liked to speculate on how hot it was, but even the suit wasn't helping much. What he needed was to get out as quickly as possible. He stumbled in the direction he recalled the door as being. Several other people coalesced out of the swirling steam, all converging on roughly the same area, and he hurried that way himself.

Deafening alarms clanged rapidly in the control room above, while steam rose in a tide that more than covered the windows overlooking

the turbine chamber. At once water began condensing on the windows and flowing back down in small streams. The steam didn't thin out at all, however, as the cooled condensation was being constantly replaced by new steam heated by the reactor.

Hsien-Ko darted over to the windows, trying to see what had happened. She made to lean against the glass, but quickly pulled back – the glass was quite warm. She couldn't see anything through the steam anyway. 'What the hell is going on here?' She joined Ying at the wall of dials and meters. Many of the needles were fluctuating wildly, while the rest had either dropped to zero or were rising into red-painted sectors.

Ying pointed to a bank of meters which were rapidly dropping to zero. 'We're losing turbine pressure...'

'To hell with that! Both inflow and outflow to the heat exchanger have gone. Radiation levels are rising in the turbine hall and we can't pump coolant into the reactor!' Hsien-Ko's blood chilled. If the reactor couldn't be cooled, far more neutrons than were healthy would build up in the reactor and unbalance the reaction. 'What's our multiplication factor?'

He looked at her, clearly not following her line of questioning. He checked the relevant gauges, making a quick calculation. 'Multiplication factor one point zero five!' He squeaked out the last word in a startled tone.

Everyone in the control room turned at that, their faces all equally pale. Hsien-Ko pointed to the levers. 'Get the control rods in, now. Override the turbine room door controls and keep them locked.'

Ying pointed down. 'But the technicians are trapped in there.'

'So is the radioactive steam. Don't you want to keep it that way?'

Kwok had just finished repairing the damage Sin had done to the lighting cables. Now all he had to do was tell Hsien-Ko what had happened and find out if she knew anything they could do about Sin or how he had turned so insane. He had the unshakeable feeling that the Doctor and/or Yan Cheh must be responsible, and was terrified that something might have happened to her to prevent her from keeping control of Sin.

On the other hand, he had warned her often enough that the Tong's records showed that even Sin's creator couldn't control him in the

end, so perhaps the fault was purely internal.

He had almost reached the last ramp up when he heard a distant boom. The ground shook and a sharp crack sent a shower of rock and dust crashing into the tunnel. Kwok dived to shelter as the rumbling died away. When he opened his eyes, the tunnel was blocked. Kwok thought hard. From here he could reach a cave mouth on Sunview Peak. Then he could go round to the Jade Emperor temple and enter the reactor level tunnels through the cave there.

Driven by an adrenalin rush of concern, Kwok ran.

Sin looked around but his surroundings were a uniform bright red, as if he were suspended in bright arterial blood.

Thermographic vision blinded by the hot steam, his targeting system switched to audio, but the whole chamber was filled with a cacophony of bells and screams.

Unable to acquire a target, Sin backtracked the directions and distance he had moved since entering the chamber in order to locate the door. He started moving as soon as the calculations were complete.

Li heaved at the door wheel, but it wouldn't budge.

Presumably someone in the control room above had noticed what was going on and somehow locked it from up there. He looked up, the long window visible as the steam thinned out with height.

There was a steel rail along the middle of the window for people to lean on. If he could manage to knock a hole in the window, he might be able to lasso it with a fire-hose and climb up. He still had the Browning, but everything here seemed to be well armoured, so it would be prudent to assume the glass was bullet-proof. He also still had a grenade for the *Kampfpistole*, however. Considering what one of them had done to the heat exchanger, bullet-proof glass should be no obstacle.

He ran back towards the middle of the chamber, using the visible windows as a guide. So far, none of the panicked technicians seemed to have thought of looking up; they were all crowding round the door controls as he left them.

Sin still couldn't see but knew that he was approaching the door, as the calculations he had made measured out the route and distance precisely. He was not expecting, therefore, to bump into something

resilient but yielding, which he recognized as a human standing in the way.

Delighted by this, Sin clutched at the human's suit and swung his knife-hand back to strike. The hand hit another human. Sin couldn't suppress a lustful giggle as he plunged into the feast around him.

Li heard the screams begin at the door and realized that Sin had found someone new to occupy himself with. He didn't care; they were only gangsters anyway. He had fitted the second grenade onto the *Kampfpistole* by now, and aimed it at the window above, bracing the gun on his free hand. He tried to judge the best angle to get the grenade to hit the glass square-on; he didn't want it to hit at an angle and ricochet off into the turbine chamber. Telling himself that Matsu would have approved of his efficiency, Li fired.

The control rods had reached the surface of the heavy water and were beginning to edge their way down into the nuclear pile itself. 'Multiplication factor now one point two,' Ying reported, 'but the rate of increase is slowing.'

Hsien-Ko nodded her acknowledgement. The control rods were working effectively already. Once they were fully in, the reaction would slow and the multiplication rate would drop below one. Then they would be safe and could set about finding out what had gone wrong.

Her heart began to resume a more normal rhythm after the past few minutes of fluttering and she relaxed slightly. This was only a delay.

Without warning, one pane of the observation window overlooking the clouded turbine chamber exploded inwards in a cloud of fragmented glass, as a metal egg sailed through it and landed by the levers opposite. Hsien-Ko ducked beneath her desk instantly, but before she could put voice to the warning in her mind, the grenade went off.

The levers controlling the placement of the control rods were shattered, while a spray of shrapnel peppered the instruments lining the walls. The technician manning the levers was blasted to bloody pulp, while Ying crashed into an instrument bank. The instruments' shattered wiring sparked and burst into flame. Ying quivered stiffly, screaming as his hair started to singe and his skin blacken, and then toppled to the ground.

Highly radioactive steam poured in through the shattered glass and

the surviving technicians, most bleeding from minor shrapnel cuts, bolted for the doors. Hsien-Ko knew she should leave too and was starting to follow them out, until she noticed the view through the more thickly armoured glass into the reactor cave.

The control rods had jerked to a halt, no more than about ten per cent into their slots in the pile. Despite her green eyes, Hsien-Ko didn't feel remotely harmonious at the moment.

Terror flooded through her, but she knew she couldn't give into it. The radiation was bad enough, but she had to try to prevent the whole mountain going up, which it would when the multiplication factor reached critical.

She snatched a protective suit off the rack by the door, and hastily clambered into it.

Li had given a brief laugh of delight when the window shattered, and ran to the wall below. The steam was already thinning out as it escaped through the control room. As a result, he had no difficulty in finding a reel of hose at a fire-point and unrolling it. It took three attempts to get the weight of the brass nozzle to wrap the end of the hose around the rail when thrown.

Li was surprised that no one else had joined him to climb up – not that it mattered – until he looked towards the door.

The bloodied Sin was furiously carving up the back of the last technician, who was clawing weakly at the doors. A number of torn and mutilated bodies lay around them.

Li felt his fear return; it would be only moments before Sin noticed him. He tugged on the hose to test its resistance to weight, then quickly hauled himself up. The rail provided a good handhold with which to climb over into the control room. Most of the instruments there were sparking and smoking, while the traitorous Ying lay dead at the base of them. Li felt blessed by the gods – obviously his grenade had executed the traitor.

The only live person in the room was a suited figure working furiously at the shattered levers opposite the window he had entered, but Li decided not to bother with whoever it was. He had clearly destroyed their plans, so what difference did it make. The figure didn't look round as he left.

Romana had never seen such panic since Gallifrey itself had been invaded not so long ago. Guards and technicians were hurtling through the tunnels aimlessly, while alarm bells rang.

Whatever was wrong, it didn't inspire much confidence.

She and the Doctor headed in the direction from which the fleeing men were coming, since that would most likely be the control room. 'The reactor?' she asked.

'Probably. It's not a very sophisticated model.'

Romana saw a familiar face through the visor of a limping figure. 'Li!'

Li paused and the Doctor grabbed his shoulders. 'What happened?'

'I blew the heat exchanger to the turbines. Whatever they're planning, it's over.'

The Doctor stared. 'What?' He thrust an accusing finger at Li. 'Do you have any idea of what you've done?'

'I've prevented these anarchists from disrupting the order promised by Japan.'

'No; you've turned this mountain into a bomb big enough to erase Shangdong province from the face of the Earth! With no coolant, the reactor will overheat, go critical – and boom!'

Li at least had the sense to blanch. The Doctor shook his head. 'I have to get there.'

Romana wondered how long ago this had started. 'We might not be in time.'

'We have to try. Get out of here,' he told Li.

The Doctor and Romana disappeared towards the control room. Li wasn't bothered; he would be rid of that troublesome pair as well. He started off towards the exit to the surface and almost immediately ran into a platoon of guards. They didn't point their guns at him, however. Rather, they looked confused and scared.

So much the better, Li thought. 'What happened?' several of them asked.

Li was about to deny any knowledge when a better idea struck him.

Here was an opportunity to finish off all those anarchists once and for all. 'Hsien-Ko betrayed us to the Doctor and the girl. She went crazy and started wrecking the control room. Spread the word.'

The guards exchanged incredulous looks, but most of them seemed to take it in. Li knew that being dressed in the technician's suit would help convince them he was an eyewitness. As they started checking their guns, Li moved off again before they could ask him any awkward questions.

Before long he met another group of Tong soldiers.

'Quick,' he shouted, 'some of the guards have turned – they've wrecked everything...'

The steam continued to escape into the tunnels, cooling and expanding in cracks and crevices all through the interior of the mountain. Elsewhere, stray sparks from the strained cables started minor fires. It didn't take long for some of those sparks to reach an ammunition box in the weapons store of a guard post. It exploded, and the process began again.

The darkness was briefly illuminated by a flash more of shock than colour, and the rocks themselves quivered.

Billowing sheets of fire flowed through the tunnels and caves like surges of blood through veins. Flocks of bats scattered from the cave-mouths amidst windblown dust mere instants before plumes of dissipating flame stabbed out into the air after them. A deep rumbling that was well below the range of human hearing gradually sent dust rising from the quivering ground.

Severed cables lashed around as angrily as startled cobras, sending bolts of lightning across the crystal veins in the rock pillars. Filtered lightning burst sporadically from the pool of heavy water that flooded the base of the reactor cave.

The air in the control room was thick with sweat and the red glow of the emergency lamps. Hsien-Ko could barely keep her hands from shaking, knowing that radiation could flood the mountain at any moment. It wouldn't bother her so much if she hadn't known what Magnus Greel had looked like in the final years, his flesh distorted and scrambled. She had never been vain about her looks, but that would be too much to bear.

This just made it even more important for her to concentrate on trying

to control the problem. The door to the tunnel slammed open and Hsien-Ko looked round, expecting to see Kwok come to rescue her. Instead, the Doctor skidded to a halt, the ends of his scarf flying, and Romana followed him in. 'You have got problems, haven't you?'

'Your police friend has destroyed the heat exchanger and the control linkages. I can't lower the control rods the rest of the way from here.'

The Doctor ran over to the observation window while Romana examined the monitoring gauges. She shook her head worriedly. 'Multiplication rate is one point four already.'

'That gives us about ten minutes before the biggest explosion this part of the world has seen since Krakatoa,' said the Doctor. Hsien-Ko felt the blood drain from her face, leaving her rather light-headed. She had been a child at that time, but still remembered the effect that the volcano had had on the skies and weather. She had failed, she saw. As Weng-Chiang failed with his zygma experiment, so she had failed with this. The Doctor tugged at the levers experimentally.

'You'd better get out of here.'

'What?'

'Use the Dragon Paths. Tell all your people it doesn't matter where they go, but get out of here!'

'There are only twelve geomantic compasses and ten of them are linked to trucks back at the Dai temple in Tai'an.

I'll tell them anyway.' Hsien-Ko reached for the intercom switch. She didn't know how many speakers would still be working, but there wasn't much else she could do. 'Attention!

Attention! This is Hsien-Ko. This area is to be evacuated, repeat evacuated. All personnel should leave immediately. I repeat, this area is to be evacuated. All personnel should leave immediately.'

'Now it's your turn.'

Hsien-Ko shook her head. She had brought all this about, so it was her responsibility to stay to the end, whatever happened. That was the honourable way. 'I'm the only one left who knows the layout of this reactor. You need my help.'

'All right, all right. We'll have to find a way to lower the control rods

manually. Can that be done without entering the reactor cavern?’

‘The chains run through a gearbox set into the roof. I’d guess the blast has stripped the gears.’

‘Well then, all we have to do is cut through the chains and the rods should fall the rest of the way in. How do I get to this gearbox?’

Hsien-Ko pointed to a trapdoor in the ceiling. ‘There’s a duct through there, that’s how it was installed.’

‘Is it shielded against the radiation?’

‘As best we can. Your big problem in there is going to be heat. Even with the shielding, it’s still going to be around two hundred degrees in there.’

‘Nasty. Very nasty.’ Hsien-Ko shoved her desk underneath the trapdoor, while the Doctor took Romana aside and lowered his voice. ‘Give me three minutes to sort out these control rods, then get out of here.’ He handed her a key. ‘You should be safe enough in the TARDIS.’

‘But what about you?’

‘After three minutes at those sorts of temperatures I’ll have succumbed to heatstroke, which in these circumstances means I’m as good as dead.’ Ignoring her horrified look, he discarded his coat and scarf and climbed into one of the protective suits.

Then he took out a slim silver device from his coat pocket.

Hsien-Ko felt ashamed for having had that flush of hatred for these two earlier; she didn’t deserve their help. ‘It seems I owe you again,’ she said, as the Doctor climbed onto the desk and prepared to lever himself into the conduit.

He paused. ‘Then repay me by putting your skills to better use.’ He disappeared into the darkness.

The Doctor’s hands and knees were uncomfortably hot through the material of the protective suit, and he tried to keep them off the metal surface of the conduit as much as possible.

Sweat was running down his face but he couldn’t wipe it away, since the hood was in the way. It didn’t take him long to reach the gears,

where the chains that suspended the control rods were jammed around their wheels. The space was just large enough for the Doctor to kneel on all fours, and contained a series of six pulley systems.

He wiggled the first experimentally but couldn't unjam it.

Instead, therefore, he made some adjustments to his sonic screwdriver. That wasn't easy, given the thickness of the gloves that were part of the protective suit. After a few seconds, he was able to direct it at the first chain. As the sound waves pounded the link he had chosen, it started to stretch and quiver, before finally snapping.

Romana and Hsien-Ko watched the reactor cavern with baited breath. Almost a whole minute had gone by, when one of the control rods suddenly dropped into place, its severed chain splashing down into the water behind it.

Another followed a few seconds later. Then another...

The wheels and chains were blurring before the Doctor's eyes and his head was pounding, but he managed to clamber over each set of gears and pulleys as he severed it. By the time he reached the sixth, his hands were shaking so badly with the heat interfering with his muscular control, that he could only hope he was cutting the right target.

Both Romana and Hsien-Ko breathed huge sighs of relief as the last control rod fell into place. They both went back to the desk under the trapdoor. By Hsien-Ko's watch, two minutes and fifty seconds had passed. Was this all her quest was bringing her? The deaths of those who should be friends?

Vengeance-seekers were only supposed to have to dig two graves.

Romana was also looking worried, as there had been no sound from the conduit for several moments. It reminded Hsien-Ko that Kwok was still missing; she wondered if she had been wearing a similar expression over the past hour or so.

She looked at her watch again. Two minutes, fifty-nine.

Shame flooded through her.

The Doctor suddenly dropped onto the desk, causing both women to jump back. He hopped from there to the ground, steadying himself against a chair and pulled off the suit's hood. His curls had been

plastered to his scalp by sweat and his face was florid. 'I'll never have turkey at Christmas again.'

Romana almost folded up as the tension left her and Hsien-Ko felt similarly relieved. The Doctor stripped off the protective suit and recovered his coat, hat and scarf. The trio left the control room, finding the tunnel outside filled with the scent of smoke.

They had barely moved into the tunnel when a group of guards turned the corner and froze in surprise. 'It's true,' the leader gasped. 'She's joined them!' They raised their guns and the Doctor, Romana and Hsien-Ko scattered for cover behind jagged rocks.

The guards opened fire, blasting chips away from the rocks, but then a more distant volley sounded. 'It's true,' someone shouted, 'the guards are traitors!'

Hsien-Ko risked a look over the top of her cover, seeing two groups of guards shooting at each other. She couldn't think why, but while they were thus occupied, she broke and ran. 'After her,' she heard someone call. She didn't stop to look back and check how many of them there were.

Sin had run out of fresh blood to release, but at least his vision had cleared. The door was beyond his ability to open, but he noticed a fire hose dangling from a shattered window above.

Snorting gently, Sin began to climb. Somewhere, there were more humans. As many as he could possibly enjoy killing.

Twenty-Two

Kwok finally emerged from the cave on Sunview Peak, and was astounded. Smoke was pouring from the cave at the top of the next set of steps. Stranger still, for some reason, several of the people he could see running to and fro were shooting at each other, or landing punches and kicks on each other. He couldn't understand it at all. Was this part of the same madness that had affected Sin?

He jogged up the steps two at a time. 'Stop!' he bellowed. 'What the hell are you doing?'

A soldier turned, raising his gun, and Kwok shot him before he could fire. He still had no idea what was happening, though. There was a shout from below and he turned back to the steps neighbouring the ones he had just climbed. A group of soldiers were ascending from Gongbei Rock. Perhaps he would get some answers, he thought.

'It's Kwok,' one of the soldiers snarled. 'He's Hsien-Ko's lapdog. He must be in with them too!' The others agreed with a chorus of hoarse cries along the lines of 'get him!' It was an answer of sorts, Kwok supposed. Obviously some of the Tong had turned against Hsien-Ko. The question would be how to tell which ones. This group, of course, had already admitted their guilt.

Kwok kicked the first man in the teeth as his head appeared over the lip of the stairs. He jack-knifed back into his fellows, who all grabbed at the rock in an attempt to stay upright. By the time they had recovered their balance, however, Kwok had scooped up his MP38 and sprayed the tangled mass of bodies with gunfire. Blood splattered across the rock wall and steps as the struggling hatchet-men flopped around like fish on a trawler's deck.

The MP38 quickly ran out of ammunition and he discarded it, since there were no spare magazines in sight. Hsien-Ko was in danger; he could feel that with a spasm of heartache. The question was; where was she?

* * *

Hsien-Ko had no idea why the Tong had split into these factions, though it would be logical to assume that the fugitive Li had something to do with it. She had to find Kwok, then together they could leave the Tong to kill each other. Her chance at revenge had

gone anyway.

She slowed in her headlong flight as she realized that the light was not just coming from the bulbs above. There was a faint blue luminescence emanating from the tiny crystal particles in the rock itself.

She stretched out a finger to touch the rock. She knew that the crystal could carry a current – that was the reason for choosing this location – but she didn't expect it to maintain that current when the power was shut down. Unless something else was causing it...either the heat from the reactor or the stresses and strains created in the rock by the blasts of exploding equipment and munitions. Either way, the resonance circuit was still operating.

She laughed softly. The gods must be on her side, if nature itself was going to allow her her chance for revenge. The point where the energy would eventually focus was the Jade Emperor temple, so she had to get there.

The quickest route was to her right and up, so that was the direction she took. Unfortunately, the time she had taken to pause by the rock had allowed the hostile soldiers to catch up; she heard one of them shout an alarm as they spotted her.

She bolted for the tunnel and took the corner very sharply.

However, there was a wall of fire where a door had been blown off a guard post, blocking the tunnel. Silhouetted against the flames was the figure of a man. He turned towards her, gun in hand.

* * *

The Doctor and Romana had been trying to find their way back to the surface since the guards had chased off Hsien-Ko.

They watched the occasional flash of a chronon discharge from the rocks with trepidation. There should definitely be some signs of the process slowing down by now.

The Doctor halted in mid-step, as if playing a game of statues, and turned slowly, making Romana wonder whether he was really interested in getting out in one piece or not.

'Someone's following us.' He looked down. Then she saw the faint shimmer in the crystal grains in the floor. The Doctor dropped to his

knees and pressed his ear against the ground.

‘What do you hear?’ Romana asked. Were these blasts causing some kind of earthquakes, she wondered.

‘Somebody singing "Hi ho, hi ho".’ He straightened, his face a mask of worry, which was most unlike him. ‘Romana, I think things are worse than we thought.’

Romana had doubted that was possible. ‘In what way?’

‘The chronon discharges are still getting bigger. Shutting down the reactor doesn’t seem to have helped.’

‘But where’s the power coming from?’

‘That’s a good question...I know!’ He thumped the floor with his fist, and winced. He got up, massaging his bruised hand. ‘Piezoelectricity!’ The explosions must have disturbed the balance of the whole structure of the mountain –’

‘Pressure causes piezoelectric discharges, and most of the cables are still intact...’

‘Which means that the energy build-up in the resonance circuit will still short out the zygma beam.’ They looked at each other, and Romana wondered whether the Doctor felt as chilled at that idea as she did. ‘Let’s go.’

‘Where?’

‘The TARDIS. There’s only one thing left we can try.’ For some reason, he didn’t sound very enthusiastic. They hurried out into a wider tunnel with daylight at the end. They emerged into the grounds of the Jade Emperor temple.

‘This is where Greel first arrived, according to Hsien-Ko,’ said Romana.

‘What? In the temple?’

‘Yes.’ She wondered what difference the specifics made.

‘Then that’s got to be where he’ll arrive today – the zygma beam can’t shift through space.’ He pointed west, to the neighbouring peak, on which stood the South Gate of Heaven.

A familiar blue box contrasted with the red bricks of the gate.

‘There’s the TARDIS.’ It was about five hundred yards away, though the path across to it curved slightly around the peak.

The time travellers rushed onwards, dodging Tong soldiers who seemed intent on fighting each other. Two tried to attack the Doctor and Romana, but their fellows used the distraction to shoot them, and so they made it to the gate unmolested.

As they approached the TARDIS, however, a soldier leapt out, swinging at the Doctor’s head with a *gim* straight sword.

The Doctor ducked and shoulder-charged him. The man went flying over the Doctor’s shoulder and landed a few feet away.

He picked himself up and raised the sword to strike out at Romana. Then suddenly he arched, blood welling up from his mouth. He pitched forward, revealing both a long tear up his back where the ribs on one side had been ripped away from the spine, and the Peking Homunculus standing behind him.

Romana had heard of its nature from the Doctor, but hadn’t imagined so graphic a demonstration that he was right. She wasn’t sure if the faint gurgling she heard was air bubbling up through the body from a collapsed lung, or Sin laughing softly.

Sin’s targeting system had a very good memory, but the heat pattern that faced him now was quite unique in its experience.

It was cooler, like a recent corpse. This was one he had faced before, the one who had consigned him to oblivion by tearing out his main power conduit.

Sin had always had bloodlust and the moment of another’s death helped sate it, but now he felt a new sensation. He couldn’t identify it except by proxy; he had felt this sensation at the back of the mind that used to intrude into his own until today.

Revenge.

Sin advanced on the Doctor.

The Doctor shuffled slightly sideways, moving unobtrusively towards the fallen sword. Sin turned to keep him in sight, then launched himself at the Doctor. The Doctor ducked, hurling Sin over his

shoulder. Sin crashed to the ground, then sat up. The corpse-like heat form of the Doctor was closing, but another was already nearby. Sin had no real discrimination where this unusual heat trace was concerned and turned to attack the nearest target.

Sin turned towards Romana, brandishing the knife. She dodged his first slash, scarcely believing his ferocity. The Doctor lassoed Sin with a loop of his scarf and hauled backwards, jerking the mannequin off his feet. Sin sliced clean through the scarf and rolled to his feet as the Doctor took a long leap for the fallen sword.

Sin lunged forward, stabbing at the Doctor's throat, but succeeded only in pinning the Doctor's hat to the wall of the TARDIS. The Doctor rolled, stabbing at Sin and embedding the tip of the sword in his chest. Sin merely plucked it out. The weapon was almost as big as himself, but Sin's programming was equal to the task of using it.

He swung at the Doctor, who leapt up onto a boulder to avoid being cut off at the knees. Romana's hand brushed against the knife which pinned the Doctor's hat to the TARDIS. The blade had buried itself in the door quite efficiently. She looked back at Sin as the Doctor knocked him off balance with a kick to the head.

Sin was catapulted backwards, sliding towards her. Romana tugged the knife and hat free, and loped forward before Sin could stand. His head started to turn, but too late to prevent her from pounding the knife into his forehead, nailing the hat in front of his eyes.

Sin dropped the sword and tore the knife free from his wooden scalp. He whirled to respond to Romana's attack. The Doctor dived into Sin's path and rolled, scooping up the sword and swinging it outwards.

Bullets and knives couldn't do much damage to Sin, but a blade set at exactly the level of the joint that articulated his head, and wide enough to cover the complete diameter of his neck, was perfect to lever off his head.

Sin's body hurtled to the ground, the joint at the neck sparking, while his head sailed through the arched gate. There was a distant thud – and what might have been a grunt of pain – as it bounced from the top of the seven-thousand-step staircase.

Romana looked at the Doctor in surprise as he dusted off his jacket. 'Very impressive.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Cleopatra's bodyguard knew a trick or

two.' He tossed the sword carelessly aside and went up to the TARDIS door. He gasped, patting his pockets. With a sigh, Romana handed him the key.

He let out the breath he had been holding and opened the door with a belated grin.

* * *

Hsien-Ko froze as the silhouetted figure turned towards her, backlit by the flames from the burning door. Somehow the footsteps behind her didn't seem half as terrifying as the sight of the figure ahead raising its hands in an obvious aiming movement. Hsien-Ko flung herself to the ground as shots boomed thunderously in the enclosed tunnel.

Screams rose from behind her as the man ahead strode forward, two pistols firing in sequence. The footsteps behind her stopped as the men making them died with the echoes of the shots. Hsien-Ko palmed the Walther PP from her belt and she knelt down as the figure stopped a couple of paces away.

It was a familiar short but lean mop-haired man in a dark coat with two shoulder-holsters. 'Anyone opposing the Sakura Kai's plans deserves a break.'

She almost laughed with relief that it was Yan Cheh. Woo reloaded quickly as she scrambled to her feet. 'Believe it or not, I'm actually glad to see you.'

'It looks as if I'm the only friend you've got right now. Is there no honour amongst thieves any more?'

'Or policemen. That bastard Sung-Chi Li has got my men fighting amongst themselves. Doubtless he thinks he can call in his Japanese friends in the confusion. Is the tunnel to the Jade Emperor temple blocked?' She pointed back the way he had come.

'All the tunnels are blocked. You can't stay here, though. Whatever you were working on isn't going to happen with all your equipment destroyed.'

'It might. The mountain has its own energy, which might just be enough to bring me Weng-Chiang. Li won't rob me of that.'

Woo's face had taken on a strangely haunted expression she didn't really understand. 'Li wants to call the Japanese?'

Hsien-Ko wasn't interested in such trivia and marched back up the tunnel. 'We caught him trying earlier. We had to break the power to our transmitter to cut him off before he could give them our position.' She blinked a few times in the sunlight as they emerged onto the summery platform that was the foundation for the Azure Clouds temple. The temple itself was on the far side. She would have to get to the Jade Emperor temple the long way round.

A group of angry footsoldiers spotted them from the garden glades of Zhanlu terrace, and started running for the Bridge of the Gods.

Woo shouldered Hsien-Ko to the ground as the leading soldier took a shot at them. Drawing his Colts, Woo fired back as rapidly as he could squeeze the triggers. The first few men spasmed and fell, but blocked the bridge rather than tumbling from it. 'If the force in Manchukuo ever took control of the Dragon Paths, it would be a disaster. Why would Li turn traitor?'

They ran upslope. By the time he had reloaded both guns, she was holding the Walther to his head. 'Manchukuo? No Chinese would call Manchuria that, even as a slip of the tongue.'

'Yin and Yang. Li is a Chinese helping the Japanese, and I'm the reverse, yes. I'd hoped that my actions here would be a hint that for now I'm on your side.'

'And later?'

'Earlier. Earlier, I was against you, because I thought you would detract from the resistance to a Japanese invasion. Now it doesn't matter. So long as you're resisting those traitors who've perverted my empire's government we're on the same side.'

She looked at him for a long moment, weighing up what he'd said. Traitors were obviously untrustworthy, since by definition they had to lie to stay alive. On the other hand, it really didn't matter any more whose side he was on, so long as she got to the Jade Emperor temple in time to execute Magnus Greel for herself. She supposed that a quick death would have to do, instead of the lingering punishment his inhuman acts had deserved, but just so long as she did so herself...After that, she could escape to anywhere with a single step. Either way, it didn't matter whether Woo would change sides after this or not.

She said, 'That's just a bonus. Weng-Chiang is all that matters to me. He has haunted my dreams all my life.'

‘Then once he’s been and gone you’ll no longer be a problem to me either way.’

She hated people stealing her words like that. ‘I’m glad we understand each other.’ She squeezed the trigger. Woo started as the blast echoed in from the surrounding rocky peaks. There was a scream from behind and he spun to see a Tong hatchet man drop lifelessly from a tree. She continued firing and another soldier fell from an outcropping with a series of bloody craters in his chest, almost flattening Woo.

Hsien-Ko removed the empty magazine from her gun as they turned back towards the Azure Clouds temple. A number of men were blocking the path. This group had evidently been on a work detail as they had no guns, but their blades and *nunchaku* would be just as deadly to the unarmed Hsien-Ko.

Woo tossed one Colt to her and drew the *katana* he wore on his back.

He warded off one man’s hatchet with a backhanded block and put three shots into his chest from only an inch away.

Hsien-Ko caught the Colt and fired in one smooth motion, blowing a spearman off his feet, while Woo spun the *katana* and severed a hand that was swinging a knife towards him.

The knifeman curled up in a foetal ball with a scream, while Hsien-Ko picked off the remaining men.

A few shots bounced from the stones around them as more men fired from the Bridge of the Gods. Woo pulled the pin from the grenade he had taken from Romana at Jining airfield, letting the safety lever fly off. When he had counted to three, he hurled it. It exploded in the middle of the wooden bridge, blasting the gunmen over the edge.

Hsien-Ko was impressed, but had other worries. She hoped Kwok hadn’t run into similar trouble, but dismissed the idea as she jogged past the Azure Clouds temple towards the path that was beside it. Kwok was even more able to look after himself than she was.

* * *

Kwok had ignored everyone who was ignoring him and shot anyone who didn’t. He had made sure that the Jade Emperor temple was secure, certain that Hsien-Ko would come here.

He was glad, therefore, to see her approaching from the path round

the Daiding guesthouse. He was less glad to see that Yan Cheh was with her. He aimed at Yan Cheh who was fast enough to draw as they closed together. In the space of two steps, each had a pistol pressed to the other's jaw. Yan Cheh showed no more fear than Kwok felt. 'An eye for an eye?'

'No,' Hsien-Ko interrupted. She pushed their arms away, interposing herself between the men. 'Save your ammunition for the real enemy.'

Kwok looked into her jade eyes. She was serious. He slipped the safety catch on and Yan Cheh lowered his gun.

'What happened?' Kwok asked as she approached. 'Sin went crazy, then so did everyone else.'

'Li electrocuted Sin; it must have overloaded the circuit that linked us. Then Li blew up the heat exchanger, so we had to shut down the reactor. I imagine he's the one who has set the Tong against each other as well.'

'Are the Doctor and Romana here?' Yan Cheh asked.

'No.' Kwok was glad of that. 'They passed on the other side of the plateau and went up to their Time Cabinet.' He pointed. Yan Cheh immediately ran off towards the path up to the South Gate of Heaven. Kwok looked at Hsien-Ko. 'The Doctor killed Sin. I saw it from here.'

She nodded. 'Perhaps it's for the best. Is the temple prepared?'

'Yes. With the reactor shut down, surely the resonance circuit won't work?'

Hsien-Ko laughed and pointed to where tiny blue sparks were setting leaves alight. 'The spirit of the mountain is keeping the circuit running.'

Twenty-Three

K9 had been slowly climbing the steps to the South Gate of Heaven for several hours. He was about halfway up when his aural sensors detected small impact sounds. At first he had been unable to calculate the source, but it was somewhere ahead of him. The fact that muffled cries of 'ow' and 'oof' had continuously accompanied them suggested that an injured human was descending the steps.

He was not prepared for the scratched and scraped white-painted head that bounced off the last few steps and rolled over to a point right below K9's snout, where it lay gurgling faintly. K9 recognized it at once, however, as the head of the automaton which had attacked them aboard the Stinson Trimotor.

Its eyes narrowed defiantly as K9 directed his blaster-beam at maximum power. The wood charred away ever more deeply until the circuitry and organic processors within had been boiled away; only a blackened charcoal husk remained.

K9 wagged his tail slightly, satisfied that this machine would pose no more threat to his master.

* * *

In the caverns, sharp reports continued. Now, however, it was the long-sought release of pressure as rock finally splintered and shifted. Crystalline veins cracked and shattered as the rock which enclosed them twisted and drooped. Blue sparks slithered around the rocks, released from their crystal prisons.

A fireball of blue lightning burst forth from the roots of a small tree, blasting the charred wood into a cloud of ashen splinters. Fingers of spitting blue fire clawed their way out of the earth, wrapping themselves around the gilded cornerposts of the Jade Emperor's temple. A Tong soldier unfortunate enough to be standing in the path of one of the electrical serpents arched with a sizzle as his flesh blackened.

Neighbouring combatants paused in the process of knocking seven bells out of each other, and scattered in search of cover as more bolts lashed across the ground around their feet.

The gathering clouds around the peak shimmered faintly with internal

sparks, while globes of translucent energy seeped out of cracks in the rock face. They swirled around in the air above the writhing currents, every colour of the rainbow represented by many fireballs.

Hsien-Ko moved, almost entranced, towards the portals of the temple. 'Wait out here,' she told Kwok. The extent of the effects she had unleashed had taken her quite by surprise, but this was after all the plan she had begun, so she would see it through. Lightning blazing from the clouds above silhouetted her in the temple doorway, the static electrical charge in the air making her hair wave gently as if she were underwater. She hardly dared peer into the temple, her green eyes as bright as the fireballs that whirled around the temple in frenetic orbits.

She stared with a childlike wonder as the temple's interior filled with sparkling light from the tendrils of electricity that were constantly flowing in from every point in the building.

She could scarcely hear herself over the build-up of thunder, but could feel herself laugh in delight for the first time since she was a child receiving some much-desired gift, and for much the same reason.

* * *

The Doctor hurtled into the console room deep in the TARDIS and skidded to a halt, measuring off distances by the stripes on his scarf. 'Put up the TARDIS force field.' Dropping the scarf he started punching buttons on the console.

Romana did so. 'What exactly did you mean by the "the only thing we can try"?'

'We can't stop power building up in the resonance circuit – at least not without dematerializing the mountain, and I can't see us managing that without the energy in the circuit blowing up the TARDIS. When the energy reaches its critical point, the zygma beam will short out along with the energy in the circuit –'

'Because the power levels aren't controlled any more?'

'Exactly. Greel will be snapped back here, causing a temporal embolism, and the feedback will blow the resonance circuit and the surrounding area. Fortunately the TARDIS' relative mass is far greater than that of his zygma cabinet.'

Romana looked at him, shocked. 'You're not thinking of time-ramming

it?’ Such recklessness was hardly Academy behaviour.

‘If you’ve got a better idea, now’s the time. We have to snap the zygma beam before it springs back by fifty years and blasts the whole mountain and that town down there into so much ash.’

‘But there’ll be a massive feedback of chronon energy.’ Romana paled.

‘If I’m right, the Earth’s magnetosphere will absorb the energy via the Dragon Paths and spread it more thinly; and, I hope, harmlessly.’

* * *

Kwok followed Hsien-Ko into the temple. He couldn’t let her face any danger alone. He didn’t know for certain that this was dangerous, but why else would she warn him to stay outside?

She looked back, an exultant look on her face. She didn’t seem angry that he had disobeyed her. ‘Can’t you feel it?’ she shouted. ‘Power to go anywhere, at any time!’ Suddenly she gasped, convulsing. ‘What?’ Hollow pain flashed across her features, and Kwok reached out to her. A huge spark of energy leapt from her, slamming him into the wall.

Kwok blinked; he was stunned, wondering if the shock was giving him hallucinations. The huge rectangular mass in the centre of the temple flickered black, bronze and blue, as the Time Cabinet and the Doctor’s TARDIS vied for the right to occupy the same point in space and time.

* * *

The console room shook, forcing the Doctor and Romana to hang onto the edges of the console to stay upright. The walls darkened, flashes of bronze lacquer snaking across them as the Time Cabinet tried to assert its right to existence in the space.

Romana looked up at the scanner. ‘Doctor, look.’ On the screen, Hsien-Ko’s face had contorted into pain incarnate.

The Doctor looked shocked. ‘It’s the chronon feedback.’

* * *

Hsien-Ko could feel time searing through her like grit scouring through a glass tube. Was this what happened to Greel? She could feel the flash burning under her skin and realized that this was what the Doctor had spoken of: the Dragon energy which irradiated her was

changing as she changed history.

She turned her head at the cost of great pain and saw Kwok pulling himself upright. He was losing her now, and she couldn't even control her mouth long enough to tell him how much she loved him. She could imagine the pain that must course through him at that, and his pain hurt her.

That was the worst of all.

The time rotor stuttered briefly but the Doctor made a quick correction, and it surged back to life. Almost immediately, the lacquered bronze which had been so stealthily infiltrating the TARDIS slithered back into nothingness.

* * *

Kwok struggled to his feet as Hsien-Ko looked round at him.

Suddenly, the TARDIS' trumpeting surged more loudly, the black and bronze image of the Time Cabinet growing more indistinct. There was a blinding flash, then the TARDIS materialized solidly in the temple.

A flash of white heat in his chest made Kwok think for a moment that he'd been shot, but then he felt the chain of his locket slide from around his neck. The locket itself had burst in a shower of molten sparks.

The geomantic compasses in the trucks down in the old Dai temple grounds exploded in firecracker blasts.

Hsien-Ko screamed, a wordless aria of pain and anguish that burned through Kwok like a white-hot lance, as the bolts of electricity blasted their way free of the generators. Smoke and sparks filled the air, crackling fingers of raw power tearing at Hsien-Ko.

Kwok tried to reach out to her, but he could feel the skin on his fingertips blister before he reached her. A void opened up under his breastbone as he drew back. Hsien-Ko's screams faded into the ultrasonics as spitting actinic light poured from her mouth and eyes, the cells of her skin splitting asunder like rock from above magma.

In moments, she was little more than an anthropomorphic column of radiant energy, then a searing globe of blue fire that pained the eyes. The light winked out, like a popped bubble, and there was no sign that she had ever existed.

Kwok dropped to his knees, a wordless keening howl escaping his mouth. He couldn't imagine life without Hsien-Ko, and now she was gone. The moment didn't seem real, as if her disappearance were a result of some trauma in his own eyes.

He felt as if his heart had vanished, leaving a vacuum in his chest where it used to be.

* * *

Woo skidded to a halt in the shade of the short archway through the gate. The police box was fading into thin air. He could hardly believe his eyes, Dragon Paths or no. He knew he should be wondering what to do next, but somehow it didn't matter yet. The shouts and shots from the open spaces all around proved that there was still enough danger to worry about.

He turned to face the peak area to take a look at the situation, but was distracted by a blurry movement in his peripheral vision: a white-suited figure stepping out behind him. There was a slight click from no more than six or seven feet behind.

He turned with what he felt was agonizing slowness, to see Inspector Sung-Chi Li come to a halt at the other end of the archway only a few feet away. Li's right hand swept up, his thumb slipping off the Browning Hi-Power's safety catch.

Woo raised his Colts instinctively, but they were barely horizontal before a flash of icy power pounded his right shoulder backwards.

The wall behind him held him upright and his left hand was firing its Colt before he really recognized the pain for what it was.

Bullets tunnelled through Li's flesh like leaping salmon plunging back into the water. One passed clear through a rib, shattering it into splinters like an oak struck by lightning. Li twisted, pushing forward against the force of the impacts in an attempt to bring his Hi-Power to bear on Woo again, but the flexing of his muscles only succeeded in scraping the shattered rib against his lung. Li's chest filled with acrid fire, his shots blowing splinters from the wood above Woo's head.

Woo had been slammed back against one of the jade-painted pillars that flanked the gate, and this perversely supported his upper right arm, bent in a right angle at the elbow so that he could fire both Colts at Li.

Meteoric impacts drove Li backwards, blooms of pain pushing the breath from him even as they forced his blood into the air. For every flash of flame that wreathed Woo's muzzles, a red flare of liquid fire spread out across Li's torso.

The dusty ground was already speckled with scarlet droplets when Li's footing finally slipped. Leaving the faintest miasma of cordite fumes and the scent of burnt flesh in the air, Li crumpled to the ground. A faint shroud of dust swirled around the fallen body as the last echoes of the gunshots dissipated like distant thunder.

Woo relaxed briefly, but instantly regretted this mistake as a wave of pain from his shoulder assailed him. He slid down the pillar onto his haunches with gritted teeth, his shoulder writing its own crimson graffiti on the pillar which supported him.

Taking a moment to balance his spirit and body to withstand the pain, he pushed himself to his feet. The gun in his left hand was clearly empty, as the slide was firmly jammed back. He slipped the slide and put the gun back in its holster, then took the other in his left hand, doubting that his wounded right shoulder could withstand the recoil if he had to shoot again without the pillar's support.

Li's fingers were flexing weakly a couple of feet from his fallen Browning Hi-Power as Woo stumbled over to him. He could feel nothing at all physically, but he could see that his torso was a ragged mess of torn clothing and torn flesh churned together in a thick gelid ooze. With every strained breath, he could taste hot and acrid copper.

He was glad of the numbness, since he doubted he could withstand the pain of so many wounds. He could feel only a strange fading sensation, like sinking into warm water.

Perhaps it was his life ebbing away.

He could hear his wife's voice calling to him. Strange, that.

He would no longer be able to tend her grave, but at least they would be together in the Garden of Felicity. He had no need to worry about being sent to any of the eighteen hells; had he not been virtuous in his pursuit of order? There were other voices too, which screamed and called him traitor. He ignored them, fearing that they might drive him mad.

He almost blacked out, but remembered to draw breath.

That was odd; he had never before noticed any need for a conscious effort to do so.

No, he and his wife would cross the Bridge of Jade together. Something hot and acrid welled up in his mouth, and he spat it out.

It was a very dark shade of red.

A pair of legs came into his field of vision: it was Yan Cheh. Li felt a twisting in his stomach as he finally saw Yan Cheh's face. This had been the officer who interned him in 1932, before Matsu came to see him. The Japanese officer.

'I doubt the Jade Emperor will allow you on to the Wheel of Transmigration,' Yan Cheh told him quietly. 'So, when you reach *yomi-tsu-kuni* instead, tell any member of the Sakura Kai you find there that Ishiguro Takashi sent you, and that you won't want for company.'

Li tried to respond, but couldn't. He wondered how long it had been since he last remembered to breathe. He could still hear the voices, though, but his wife's was not among them. Li felt a chill of fear. What had happened to her? All he could hear were the screaming voices: anguished and sorrowful, calling him traitor.

They didn't need to draw breath.

Woo straightened after speaking. It had been so long since he had used his real name that the syllables felt strange in his mouth.

Li's eyes visibly moistened, whether with pain or guilt Woo couldn't tell. His lips moved slightly, trying to form words, but only a faint rattling came, his eyes unfocused, filming over. Woo let his arm droop; he didn't even have the energy left to be as gloating as he'd like, and decided to settle for being relieved to have survived at all. And for what? So that he could say he defeated a rival traitor? The Japanese Army was large enough to not even miss him. At least in the club he could see what effect a little relaxation had on people.

In spite of himself, he wondered how Rondo was doing.

There was a fine irony, he thought. He'd used the club as a cover for so long that it had become more important than his original plan. He supposed he had changed in the years since he went rogue. Somehow, the death of one traitor didn't seem to mean as much as maintaining the good spirits of many.

Happy people would work or fight better the next day. It wasn't a question of changing his objectives, just the strategy.

He tossed his empty guns onto Li's body. 'You keep them. Influence is more deadly.' And doesn't sting as much, he thought, fighting against a wave of nausea.

He saw that the doors of the Jade Emperor temple on the opposite peak were ajar and that the police box was somehow now inside. Someone must have carried it there, he thought, though he couldn't imagine why.

It didn't matter; he would just go there to look for the Doctor anyway. As he emerged from the gate, he saw Kwok kneeling foetally in the dust outside the temple, shaking slightly. Moving closer, he realized that the Black Scorpion enforcer was in fact racked with sobs, tears streaming down his face. He didn't show the slightest sign of noticing Woo's presence, which was equally strange.

* * *

The Doctor and Romana emerged from the police box just as Woo entered the temple. Woo had thought Hsien-Ko would have been around here. This was where she had been heading, after all. 'Are you all right?' the Doctor asked.

'Not really. Isn't Hsien-Ko around? I just saw Kwok -' Something fell into place in his mind. Kwok had been devoted to Hsien-Ko so much he didn't care about anyone or anything else, and now he was reduced to a sobbing wreck.

'She's dead?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'Not exactly. You could almost say she never existed. Chronon feedback, you see: Hsien-Ko's life-span has become a redundant timeline now that Magnus Greel's zygma beam was short-circuited here. In normal temporal mechanics that would mean everyone would forget about her, but since the zygma beam isn't a closed loop and only she was affected by the chronons...That's why you should really leave temporal mechanics to the professionals.'

'Like us,' Romana added. 'I thought she might have aged to her real age, but not this...'

'The expected rarely happens.' The Doctor shook his head.

‘I should have expected something like this. If we’d brought her into the TARDIS first, she would have been protected until the chronon feedback had played itself out.’

‘You can’t think of everything,’ Romana said quietly.

‘No.’ The Doctor kicked out at a piece of rubble. ‘In this business, I should.’ He looked up. ‘What’s happening outside?’

Woo shrugged, then staggered slightly as the movement painfully reminded him of his wound. ‘The fighting seems to have stopped. Everyone is clearing away bodies and presumably trying to work out what to do next.’

The Doctor nodded and went outside where small fires were burning here and there. People were indeed moving bodies, though all were watching their neighbours with suspicion. ‘Try the tracer now.’

Romana looked surprised as if she’d forgotten all about it, then pulled the delicate wand from its customary hiding-place in her sleeve. It remained completely silent. ‘Nothing.’

‘K9 can double-check, but that’s an encouraging sign.’

Woo noticed movement out of the corner of his eye.

Kwok’s head had come up at the sound of the Doctor’s voice.

His face was completely bloodless, his eyes glittering as he pulled a gun. Woo was in no shape to react in time, but was halfway towards a quick draw anyway, when a red-tinted heat haze spread across Kwok. He toppled forward, though he was visibly still breathing.

Woo looked beyond Kwok and saw K9’s head poking above the edge of the little plateau. He climbed fully onto the ground as they watched, his casing settling down over his traction system once he was on smooth ground. ‘We should kill Kwok,’ Woo pointed out, knowing that the Doctor would disagree. ‘But I don’t think I could do it. Not after today.’

‘He’s had a hard day. What kept you, K9?’

‘I think he did quite well,’ Romana protested. ‘There were an awful lot of steps down there.’

‘He’s certainly no mountain goat. K9, can you detect any sign of

chronon activity?’

‘Negative, master.’

The Doctor grinned, turning to Woo. ‘There you go; how does it feel to have saved civilization as you know it?’

‘Painful.’

‘Oh, yes. Let’s get that shoulder seen to.’

‘You know something?’

‘Hmm?’

Woo could hardly find a way to phrase it, as it sounded so strange to him; he had been thinking this way since before the excuse he had given Romana for his nocturnal activities. ‘I think I prefer the running-the-club part. It’s not as sore.’

Shanghai would be too dangerous for him after the Imperial Army moved in anyway.

An aircraft roared overhead, banking for a slow pass. He had no difficulty making out the red discs on the wings. The Doctor frowned. ‘I’d say the Black Scorpion aren’t going to have the use of this place much longer. We’ll have to do something about burying that reactor for good.’

Romana shrugged. ‘We can transport in a few hundred tons of cement in the TARDIS.’

‘Good idea.’

Woo looked around wistfully. ‘Perhaps Los Angeles or San Francisco could use a new nightclub.’

The Doctor strolled into the TARDIS’ console room, tossing his hat onto the top of the time rotor before closing the doors.

‘Kwok’s in hospital – though I doubt the finest surgeons in the universe can cure a broken heart – Woo’s arranged transport back to Shanghai, and what’s left of the Peking Homunculus has been cremated with absolutely no honours at all. All the tunnels to the reactor have been filled in, though I don’t really think the TARDIS was designed for terraforming operations.’

Romana was examining the read-out that the tracer was giving now that it was back in its socket in the console. 'Well?'

Romana smiled in satisfaction. 'I've got a fix on the coordinates of the fourth segment now. It's not on this planet or century at all.'

The Doctor coughed discreetly. 'And you still trust that thing after all this?' He shook his head sorrowfully.

'Personally, I don't think it's the same without a vellum map full of dotted lines and a big X where you're supposed to go. What do you think, K9?'

'Affirmative, master. Vellum map and locatormutor core are two distinctly separate classes of object.'

'That wasn't quite what I meant.' The Doctor threw the dematerialization switch huffily, as Romana suppressed a smile of superiority.

One eye stared up, not seeing the grubby paintwork of the hospital ceiling. Instead it saw a green-eyed woman in flames and a blue box.

A voice called, 'Doctor,' and Kwok sat upright, fingers twitching. It was only a nurse calling one of the KMT surgeons, so he relaxed, floating away on a gentle raft of morphine.

And, like so many, dreamt of revenge.

Glossary

Ah – Familial prefix to the name of someone close.

Akatonbo – Literally ‘dragonflies’, Japanese air force nickname for their training aircraft.

Boxers – Rebellious martial artists who sought to overthrow western exploitation of China. They believed their spiritual strength would make them immune to guns.
They were wrong.

Ch’i – Spiritual energy.

Dai lo – Title for an immediate superior in a Tong or Triad, the translation approximating ‘big brother’.

Feng shui – Literally ‘wind and water’. The Chinese art of geomancy, which uses analyses of geographical and spiritual factors to determine the fortune of a given location.

Gaijin – Foreigner, usually meaning occidental.

Geisha – A Japanese girl trained in the arts of hosting and entertaining. Not as salacious as it sounds.

Gim – Straight-bladed sword.

Gwai lo – Literally ‘ghost man’. Generic term for occidentals, which, like gringo in Latin America or Blanc in Haiti, is not necessarily pejorative.

Junk – Chinese ship with sails.

Kampfpistole – German pistol intended to double as a flare pistol and grenade launcher.

Katana – Standard samurai sword.

Kodo Ha – ‘Kingly Way’ faction of the Japanese military, which favoured further expansion in Manchuria to offset Soviet strategic advantages.

Kwantung Army – The Japanese army in Manchuria.

Manchu – Last real Chinese dynasty, from the seventeenth century onwards.

Mah-jong – Game using painted chips like dominoes, but infinitely more complex.

Ming – Chinese dynasty usually perceived as benevolent (though not actually any more so than any other dynasty) who were usurped by the Ching, or Manchus.

Nunchaku – Chain-sticks banned by the BBFC from every film in which they appear (necessitating the removal of a whole level from Game of Death – criminal!).

Panzerwurkorper – German anti-tank grenade.

Sakura Kai – ‘Cherry Society’, a brotherhood of like-minded Japanese officers and politicians who felt that Japan was being economically strangled and saw aggressive military policies as the only way to ensure Japan’s independent strength.

Sampan – Chinese oar-powered boat.

Tanto – Japanese dagger not unlike the last few inches of a katana.

Tosei Ha – ‘Control group’ faction in the Japanese military, which viewed China as an enemy, but intended to work within the political system.

Yomi-tsu-kuni – ‘Land of darkness’, the Japanese Hades.

I’ll apologize now for anything I’ve missed.



THE SHADOW OF WENG-CHIANG

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL FEATURING THE FOURTH DOCTOR, ROMANA
AND K-9.

**‘THEY SAY A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH
BUT A SINGLE STEP. IF I’M RIGHT, THEN A JOURNEY OF A
THOUSAND MILES WILL TAKE BUT A SINGLE STEP.’**

The search for the fourth segment of the Key to Time brings the TARDIS to 1930s Shanghai: a dark and shadowy world, riven by conflict and threatened by the expansion of the Japanese Empire.

Meanwhile, the savage Tongs pursue their own mysterious agenda in the city’s illegal clubs and opium dens.

Manipulated by an elusive foe, the Doctor is obliged to follow the Dragon Path — the side-effect of a disastrous experiment in the far future.

But would two segments of the Key be on the same planet? Is the Black Guardian behind the dark schemes of the beautiful Hsien-Ko?
And who is the small child who always accompanies her?

*This adventure takes place between the television stories **THE STONES OF BLOOD** and **THE ANDROIDS OF TARA**.*

*David A. McIntee has written three New Adventures as well as the Missing Adventure **Lords of the Storm**. He says no one in their right mind would even suggest a sequel to **The Talons of Weng-Chiang**, which is why he volunteered instead.*

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